

Amon Amarth
Versus the World



Did they really expect the world to be their allies with an album cover like that?

Subscription rates are **For The US**: \$6 for every 4 issues, \$12 for 8, \$18 for 12, \$25 for 24, or \$52 for 52 issues. **For Canada and Mexico**: \$7 for 4 issues, \$14 for 8, \$21 for 12, \$31 for 24, or \$65 for 52 issues; and **For Elsewhere**: \$9 for 4 issues, \$17 for 8, \$25 for 12, \$43 for 24, or \$80 for 52 issues elsewhere, payable by check or money order made out to James Raggi (US only), or WELL CONCEALED cash, or paypal to lotfp@mindspring.com. Be sure to note how many issues total you want, and where you want them sent! Back issues are available, check the website for availability.

If a new subscriber (for 24 issues) names you as referring him, or if you buy a subscription (24 issues) as a gift for someone else, you get 2 issues added to your subscription.

All submissions are welcome for review. Both band and record label will receive the issue with the review. Please review the website to be sure LotFP is the appropriate venue for your material first.

We welcome all reader comments and suggestions. All correspondence related to this newsletter will be considered for printing.

All written material is ©Jim Raggi unless otherwise noted.

Contact LotFP Weekly:

710 Peachtree St #134 Atlanta, GA 30308
<http://lotfp.cjb.net> lotfp@mindspring.com
 404-876-3353 IM: Jim LotFP
 Web forum hosted by www.ultimatemetal.com

Tune in to LotFP's internet radio show Realm of Chaos every Wednesday 6pm-9pm Eastern time at www.seismicradio.com

LAMENTATIONS OF THE BLAME PRINCESS WEEKLY

==FEATURE INTERVIEW==

AURORA

You'd think that AURORA would get far more attention than they do. With the whole melodic death metal thing being hot for years now, and AURORA being around for most of that, the metal public should have already turned to them. No, they'd never be the most popular thing, they're too weird for that, but they should be floating around the consciousness of the scene. But from where I sit, they aren't. And that's silly. They've got everything except the desire to sound like the leaders and play nice with the scene, which I guess is their real problem. Damn. They combine what we know as melodic death metal with a more textured and melancholy approach, definitely not coming across like people who exist because they loved the early WAR catalog, that's for sure. Closest comparisons would honestly be latter day DARK TRANQUILLITY, which is interesting because I lap up AURORA material with a spoon and have found DT to be kind of lifeless. Anyway. This year saw a new album on a new label for AURORA, and it was my time to get the band in these pages. Anders Vestergaard, guitar player and songwriter, played the role of interviewee, giving up the AURORA information and also giving his perspective as a writer for a major national metal magazine...

I guess we should start off with the most basic, boring question. If you could give the background of the band?

The band was formed here in Aabenraa which is located in the south of Denmark in the beginning of the 90s. After all of the usual, you know lineup changes and name changes. The first demo tape was released in 96, the demo tape was called *Childhood Memories*. Back then the band was known as AURORA BOREALIS, but after the demo tape, the band shortened its name to AURORA, and secured a deal with the Danish label Serious Entertainment, which was owned by a Danish producer Jacob Hansen. Serious Entertainment released the first AURORA album *Eos* in 1998, and that one was followed up by mini-CD called *Sadiam* in 1999.

After that I joined the band. I recorded my first album with the band in 1999, and *Devotion* was released in 2000. Well, here we are in 2002 with a new label with a new CD. Serious Entertainment closed down after releasing *Devotion* so we have

In This Issue

- 1 Aurora Interview
- 5 Hagen Interview
- 8 Iron Maiden News, News In Brief
- Reviews
- 9 Abscess, Avantasia
- 10 Centurion, Hate Eternal
- 11 Heimdal, Steel Prophet
- 12 Thy Majestie, Thyrfing
- 13 Matthew Harper
- 14 Psychotic Waltz review

changed to the Italian label Lucretia Records and they have just recently released *Dead Electric Nightmares*, and I guess that is the reason you are now going to interview me.

What does AURORA stand for musically?

It stands for original and melodic metal. We combine the beautiful melodies and dark atmosphere with an extreme expression. For me, it is important that a band tries to do something unique with the music and not just follow the trends set by other bands. I guess that's what I try to accomplish when writing music for AURORA. I've always liked Jacob Hansen as a producer. I've always thought he was very, very good. But his record label never seemed to get to that next level, and now it seems it's gone.

It's gone off the face of the planet! I definitely agree with you about his skills as a producer. He's also a good friend of mine, and I like him as a person too. But as a businessman, I liked working with Serious Entertainment. He's a very fair person, an honest person, which is unfortunately very rare in this business, but I guess we can all agree that the label didn't run that well, he was haunted by problems all the time. He had a great roster of bands and released some great CDs, but somehow he couldn't get it running. Maybe he spent too much producing? I guess he's more of a musician and producer than he is a businessman. His reason for being involved in this label business was because he liked to help bands he liked. Maybe he didn't have the business skills. It all collided after we released *Devotion*. Shortly after it was released he had to shut down the label. That was quite a blow for us, because the album wasn't given any promotion besides what we were doing ourselves. We weren't even working with management at that time, so me and Thomas [Broberg], the other guitarist, we had to send out CDs to the labels and the media. That was quite a blow for us.

Always fun when your label goes belly up, huh?

At least the album still got distributed after the label went down. Luckily almost all of the bands that were on the label secured new deals. It wasn't too hard, he had signed a lot of quality bands. AUTUMN LEAVES has disbanded, otherwise I think all of us are on different labels now.

The new label, maybe I just haven't paid too much attention, but I didn't know they dealt with your type of music.

I didn't either, actually. Claus [Jensen], our manager from Intromental Management, he is in good contact with Lorenzo [Dehol], who owns Lucretia. He sent him our promo CD we made in 2001 and somehow Lorenzo really liked what he was hearing, so he was really eager to release this album. As it turns out, he presented us the best deal we could get so it ended up being him who released this album in Europe. I'm pretty happy being on that label. It's true he's been releasing mostly progressive metal and melodic power metal stuff, but it's good being different than the other bands. We don't get lost in the mess of other bands that easy. All in all, it's a good thing.

As a writer, you may have some extra insight on this. What have you run into with AURORA being reviewed by people who usually review progressive metal CDs?

Our distributors in different countries send promos to the major media, so we get reviewed where we need to. We also get reviews in prog media. Some of the reviewers really seem to dig the music. I'm a huge fan of progressive music myself, that's what I mainly write about. Of course some of them have a problem dealing with the vocals. They show a death metal background and they are more extreme than what's normally in progressive metal... [we complain about knee-jerk growly haters in a boring an unconstructive way for a bit] But a band like OPETH, they have done good work getting more extreme metal to a lot of different fans. Progressive fans, DREAM THEATER fans, are getting fond of OPETH. Also SOILWORK is doing the same thing. It's good for the music scene. Our music is not for the narrow minded, and I don't care that much about the narrow minded listeners. I guess there still are a lot of these people around, who expect music to fit a certain label, a certain category. It has to be black metal, or it has to be typical progressive metal like DREAM THEATER sounded in 92 with high pitched vocals and keyboards. I really don't care for that personally. I listen to everything from pop music like A-HA and Billy Idol to extreme metal and progressive metal, traditional heavy metal stuff.

As far as AURORA goes, for the people that haven't heard you, where exactly does AURORA fit into the Giant Handbook of Neat Musical Styles?

Ooh. It's hard categorizing what you've done. I guess our main audience will be people into bands like IN FLAMES and DARK TRANQUILLITY, stuff like that. Everybody who has an open mind about music, who likes emotional and melodic stuff, that's a possible target for it, you could say.

When I describe it to people, let's see if you kill me for this one, I call it melodic death metal, but the melody is more like KATATONIA than an IN FLAMES or IRON MAIDEN kind of way.

Definitely. I can agree with you one hundred percent. A band like KATATONIA, especially their three latest records, that's a huge inspiration for me. British gothic bands, both the newer stuff like PARADISE LOST and also older bands like SISTERS OF MERCY, that's one of my main inspirations when it comes to creating melodies. We combine it with the energy of IN FLAMES and traditional heavy metal bands. But it is the more pop rock melodies that inspires me.

So what goes into writing an AURORA song?

For our newest album, *Dead Electric Nightmares*, I am responsible for most of the music. I've written seven of the ten songs and our bass player, Carsten Terp, has written the rest of them. He also wrote the entire *Devotion* CD. His way of writing, he comes up with the basic melodies, basic chords, and a loose arrangement, and he brings it to rehearsal and we try to put it all together into a decent AURORA song. My way of writing, I'm a little more specific from the beginning, writing a great deal of guitar parts and the arrangement. I normally prepare all of that before going into rehearsal with the guys. It's only seldom that things are getting changed in the rehearsal. That's my way of working.

And of course Thomas is responsible for his own solos, and sometimes I have ideas for how the drums shall sound, but more often than not our drummer ends up doing something totally different than what I was expecting. It's cool that way. If I had been doing everything myself, I guess the music wouldn't be quite as hard hitting as it is today. The other guys put a lot of extra metal energy into the music.

The way the vocals are on the albums, that's definitely the most extreme element on the album. I'm definitely not complaining, but if I were to have a criticism of the band, sometimes it's just a bit too much over the course of the whole album.

We have discussed that sometimes. You're definitely not the only person who's told that to us. We've been working with those kinds of vocals from the beginning and it is a very integral part of AURORA's sound, but we always have fights about that in the studio. I would also like to have more parts with clean vocals I guess. Sometimes it comes down to what the other guys think of the music, what Claus [Frelund] thinks, or sometimes his singing abilities set the limits for what we can do and what we can not do.

Are you clued into what some of these lyrics are about? I know you're not the one doing them...

The lyrics are Claus' main area, but I follow them closely and I always get to read when he's working on new stuff. I really like his lyrics. They are a bit different from what a lot of other metal bands have. The lyrics of *Dead Electric Nightmares*, they don't have any sort of concept to them but some themes go in the different songs. Claus is studying philosophy so he's interested in a lot of philosophic elements, and I guess the song New God Rising, it's very obvious. A lot of them are about human failure, both in general and in individual cases. The album before, *Devotion*, there were a lot of tragic love lyrics about what happens when a relationship goes wrong, when two people lose the mental connection between them. On the new one, the theme is more about life in general, you can say.

On the last album, talking about Mrs. Pink, that's quite interesting on a metal album.

<laughs> Well, some people seem to like it and some people don't. I don't know. I think it's a cool thing, it's something that sets us apart from the rest of the metal scene, and no matter what, that is very important in the overcrowded metal scene of today. It's cool to not be afraid to do something different and not just using all the normal cliché titles.

For *Dead Electric Nightmares*, the artwork is definitely more into the post-industrial age, with the computer chip artwork.

There's a bit of FEAR FACTORY inspiration in that. It's Lorenzo from Lucretia Records who did it. It's funny with the computer technology pictures, I have read more than one review where our lyrics are suddenly compared to FEAR FACTORY, which makes no sense at all! I guess they were more busy looking at the cover than actually reading the lyrics. I found that quite funny!

The last thing the world needs is another man versus machine concept album.

Definitely. There's more man than machine on our albums. The lyrics don't deal with technology, it's not something that interests Claus. But we have that human

music to weigh them down. Thus, few bands sounded just like any others, and influences were largely from metal and prog rock bands of the past. The band that was ASLAN back in 1986 grew from a promising metal act heavily inspired by BLACK SABBATH and JUDAS PRIEST into something further along a road that also incorporated JETHRO TULL, the psychedelia of the early 70s, and perhaps the early prog metal progenitors like QUEENSRYCHE and FATES WARNING. The result on *A Social Grace* is a technical medley of Sabbath riffs that are grooving and heavy, quick and frequent changes of mood and riff, and a very dark, crazed atmosphere that the band's new name fit much better than their old C.S. Lewis-inspired one. Really, the band's name is extremely indicative of the music they played on their first two albums.

THE PRODUCTION

While not outstanding, the only mark off of the sound sheet for this album is perhaps it's low volume. The guitar could be thicker, but really the direction they went for was more an even mix where all instruments can be heard quite clearly. A remastering (yeah, when are we gonna see THAT?) would work WONDERS for an album with music that still sounds fresh after over a decade.

THE VOCALS

As the band is sadly unsung as one of the legends of prog metal, so is Buddy Lackey largely overlooked. His range is large and his approach, even on the first album, is quite wild. At this point, he credited his largest influence to Ian Anderson of JETHRO TULL, but you can hear everyone from John Arch and Geoff Tate to Ozzy and Rob Halford. He's very precise in singing the lyrics – sensible, since he wrote them all himself. His melodies meander, sometimes soft and very soulful, sometimes harsh or soaring. Like Dio or Jorn Lande, Buddy has a bucketful of soul in his repertoire of tricks, so you can really tell that he's singing with great feeling.

THE MUSICIANS

Norm Leggio is of immediate note: the constant shifts and changes in the music are seemingly led by his complex patterns and near flawless timing. He uses the cymbals sparingly compared to many prog metal drummers, going instead for more toms and a really pounding sound. Ward Evans is mixed very nicely – his bass tone is nice and thick, yet doesn't intrude at all on the guitars. His lines are grooving, and though he often follows the thick doomy riffs, you hear each note and he provides far more than just background. Rock and McAlpin hadn't caught the IRON MAIDEN bug particularly, and while there are wonderful guitar harmonies throughout, they don't have that MAIDEN sound but instead go for wild chromatic patterns that shift and swirl, yet remain in astounding synchronicity. Historically it seems like Rock was more the Sabbath riff man and McAlpin more the solo monster, but they both have all the chops needed to pull off this material.

THE SONGS, THE LYRICS

Sixty minutes of blistering prog metal with no clichés await you on *A Social Grace*. These songs are raw yet

complex, very metal and very intense. The major exceptions are "I Remember," written entirely by Lackey and an obvious homage to Ian Anderson and JETHRO TULL, and the band's anthem "A Psychotic Waltz," which really is in 3/4 and has a venomous swagging groove. Many songs have acoustic guitar parts either at their beginning or in interludes, but they blend seamlessly into metal riffs, so naturally that I hardly notice the shift. As I've mentioned, the riffing on most pieces alternates between doomy Sabbath-esque riffs and frantic, quite thrashy ones. Despite the occasional hint of prog rock (as in the aforementioned ode to TULL), this is an extremely METAL album. If they had had the right equipment and production this band would have sounded a bit like NEVERMORE circa *Politics of Ecstasy* and *Dream Neon Black*, only more complex more often. The psychedelic touches fit in so well with the twisted music; the song "In This Place," obviously about a mental ward, even features the schizophrenic ramblings of "Uncle Craig Marquise" (a relative of a band member?) fully integrated into the song. Another song, "Successor" follows the lyrical path of QUEENSRYCHE's "NM156"/"Screaming in Digital," telling a tale of a thinking machine that will one day surpass its master. Of all the songs, "Only in a Dream" is probably the most straightforward tune to actually be heavy; it starts very mellow but moves into a driving, headbanging anthem that reminds me somehow of "Without a Trace" from FATES WARNING's *The Spectre Within* musically, but lyrically is about overcoming handicaps to live out our dreams. While many of the usual 'metal' type topics are covered, Lackey treats them in ways that seem fresh and different. To culminate the trippy, heavy, bewildering ride, you get treated to about 10 seconds from the film *Spinal Tap*!

IN CONCLUSION

With their debut album PSYCHOTIC WALZ garnished a large amount of success in the European metal scene. They got Album of the Month awards left and right, yet recognition in the United States would never be theirs, even while metal was still reigning strong in the early 90s. They sadly broke up in 1996 after their fourth album *Bleeding*, which was also received very well by the European press. A succession of bad record deals led to a necessary parting of the ways. Now of course Buddy Lackey has returned as Devon Graves, fronting the impressive but nowhere-near-as-complex DEAD SOUL TRIBE. Dan Rock on occasion releases a PW-like album under the moniker DARKSTAR (he's made two so far, and McAlpin guests on the second). There are many tales of great bands with amazing promise destroyed by the music industry, and PW lived such a tale. Yet for those moments in 1989 and 1990 when they recorded *A Social Grace*, it must have been an exciting time. A new form of music, a wonderfully unique style all their own, a synthesis of all the influences of the musicians involved. For the listener, that time is displayed in full auditory splendor, reproducible over and over again by hitting the repeat button. Chances are, you'll want to do that the first time you hear *A Social Grace*.

enjoying a death metal album full of powerful, exotic melodies. Again I read MM, and found EDGE OF SANITY *Crimson*. Around this time it was also pointed out to me, by a friend, that if I liked DREAM THEATER I would like RUSH. He gave me some RUSH tapes, and I heard my first prog rock. I found more with help of a local record shop owner: YES, KING CRIMSON, GENTLE GIANT, ELP, URIAH HEEP, and the band that amazed me more than any other before, a band I never suspected was even progressive rock. GENESIS. With one Peter Gabriel singing, and some guy named Phil Collins beating the drum kit in such a way as to make Neil Peart or Mike Portnoy seem utterly brash and straightforward. At the same time I was discovering OPETH's *Morningrise* and SKYCLAD's *Silent Whales of Lunar Sea* I was listening to YES *Close to the Edge* and GENESIS *Foxrot*. What I was looking for in my music was intensity, complexity, and a sense of the epic, and I could find it in metal and in prog rock.

The first computer that I alone owned was my gateway to the internet and a way for me to spend the money I was earning with part-time jobs. I scoured the net for music, metal of all sorts and progressive rock. At first I found so much information that I had no idea where to start. In the days before MP3s and broadband, soundfiles were fairly rare. I found some cool people who were willing to help me by sending me tapes. Later I discovered a number of different web resources, and eventually I became one of the people sending tapes and later CDRs to introduce people to new music. In my silly altruistic delusional mind, getting someone into a great band, seeing the light of joy and wonder in their eyes at hearing something new and wonderful, is a great experience.

I don't mean to imply I've graduated from novice to guru in the twelve years I've been a serious music fan. Like Jim, I'm someone who loves metal and can write about it (hopefully) without sounding ignorant— I try hard to make sure I know as much as possible about what I'm panning and praising. Unlike Jim, I come from a background in the progressive and 'classic' metal scenes, so obviously we won't be agreeing on everything. I like tight musicianship, complex songs structures, good lyrics, and real drums played expertly. I hate drum sequencers, singers with thick accents and no personality, sloppy performances, and lyrics with more grammatical errors than there are songs on the album. I'm picky but open-minded (I'll listen to anything – once or twice), stubborn in my opinions but open to new ideas and alternate views, and really I don't like talking about myself as much as this column would lead you to believe.

As for professional qualifications, I think what has most prepared me for this sort of job is the six years I've spent writing reviews online and to a lesser extent the year and a half DJing a prog rock/metal show for the university radio station. There's a piece of paper I got back in 2000 claiming I have a Bachelor's of Science in biochemistry, and there's a teaching assistantship for graduate school in my name so I can pursue a PhD, but those aren't musical qualifications. They really mean

nothing to most anybody except another scientist. Since most of you readers aren't in the sciences, I'll spare you any techno-babble and stick to the prime passion that brings us together here on this page, your eyes and my words: MUSIC.

RETRO REVIEW by Matthew Harper



Artist/Group: PSYCHOTIC WALTZ
Album: *A Social Grace*
Release: 1990, Sub-Sonic Publishing for Rising Sun Records (out of print)

Line-up:

Ward Evans— bass, tambourine
Norm Leggio— drums, African percussion
Brian McAlpin— lead guitar, acoustic guitar
Dan Rock— lead guitar, six- and twelve-string acoustic guitars, piano, keyboards, vibraphone
Buddy Lackey— lead vocals, flute, piano, keyboards, acoustic guitar

Tracks:

1. And the Devil Cried (5:43)
2. Halo of Thorns (5:31)
3. Another Prophet Song (5:27)
4. Successor (4:12)
5. In This Place (4:10)
6. I Remember (5:28)
7. Sleeping Dogs (1:33)
8. I of the Storm (4:33)
9. A Psychotic Waltz (6:11)
10. Only in a Dream (3:36)
11. Spiral Tower (5:59)
12. Strange (6:38)
13. Nothing (5:44)

PSYCHOTIC WALTZ is one of the great 'lost' bands of progressive metal. They were not just underappreciated before their breakup in 1996; to this day their name is hardly uttered by prog metal pundits and their albums are absent from 'best of' lists for the genre. Considering the brilliant music they wrote and performed, especially on their first two albums, this lack of attention almost criminal. Here we'll take a closer look at the California quintet's debut, the lengthy, heavy, twisted *A Social Grace*.

STYLE

Back in 1990 prog metal was barely born. WATCHTOWER's first two legendary releases were out, a band called DREAM THEATER had released their promising debut, and FATES WARNING was making definitive strides to their current Rush-like style. Obscure acts like SIEGES EVEN, MEKONG DELTA, and PSYCHOTIC WALTZ came onto the scene with very little backlog of heavy progressive

failure theme, which is a theme on man versus machine albums, I guess that's the only thing that could be compared.

Once UDO put out an album with man and machine, the subject was officially closed.

Yeah! <laughs> There is nothing more to say there.

The title itself, *Dead Electric Nightmares*, what does that mean?

We got a deadline from the label and had to find a title! I put those three words together and thought it sounded cool. I convinced the other guys that's what he title should be and it ended up that way. There's also a meaning behind it. Man is basically just electric reactions and chemicals, then what happens in a man's mind in a coma, that's what I refer to as dead electric nightmares. All the dreams are just created by electricity in a man's mind. In some ways, I think it relates to some of the lyrics. It sounds cool. It sounds metal as fuck. <laughs>

I think the cover artwork of the debut album has to be one of the most striking artwork examples I've seen. The whole image, this horizon on its side... And then I can not understand at all the cover art of the EP.

That's my favorite AURORA cover artwork! Our bass player has made this

picture, it's two meters by two meters, this huge picture he has worked on all the time, always adding new elements to it. We took a picture of it and it ended up as the cover artwork. That was very simple and very cheap! I wasn't even in the band at the time but when I was handed the CD I was stunned by the cover art. I really think it's so beautiful with those flowers and the green stuff on the dark background. It could be something from an old punk record, it looks a bit trashy I guess, then with the beautiful elements added to the surface, it has a huge effect on me. But the cover art of Eos was made by a Norwegian artist, I think it was one of Jacob Hansen's contacts. He did cover art for various bands on Serious Entertainment. It has a great effect. The visual side of AURORA is very important for us. The other guitarist, Thomas, he's a graphic designer, and that has affected the rest of the band as well. We're always pretty careful in choosing the artwork. It has to be something out of the ordinary to catch the buyer's

attention and also it would have to be something beautiful to look at.

Never going to have a cover that's just a skull then. Eh, it will probably not happen. <laughs>

As a writer for Metalized, how long have you been doing that?

Two years I guess?

Metalized is pretty much the metal magazine in Denmark, isn't it?

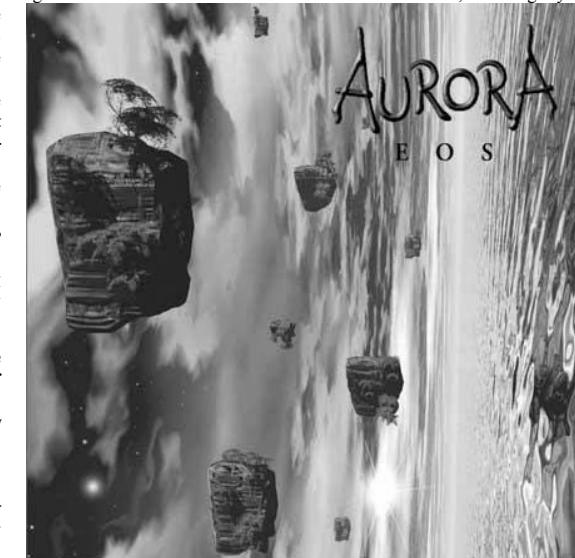
I guess you can say that. There's another good magazine called Energy. Those are the two leading magazines. Metalized has been around a pretty long time, since the end of the 80s so that makes it the oldest living music magazine in Denmark for that sort of thing. If you could tell me a bit about the magazine itself?

Most of the writers are given a free hand to do what they want to do. There are four people who are part of the staff. We are about three or four people who are freelance writers, including myself. Even though I free-

lance, everything called heavy metal, everything called progressive metal, hard rock, all of that falls under my category. I have way too much work at times. I have to sit and listen to endless piles of true metal, I hate that term! True metal

MANOWAR, HAMMERFALL ripoffs. That gets a bit annoying at times. I'm trying to get rid of some of that, I'm mostly interested in writing about the progressive scene.

As far as the HAMMERFALL clones, is the power metal scene still on the upswing as far as popularity and sales? Hopefully we are starting to see only the stronger bands come through but still there are endless piles of power metal records. These days, they don't put out a lot of really sucky records. These days, everybody has learned how to play their instruments, you can get a good production for a fair price, and with all that it's pretty easy to get out a good sounding product. The problem is the originality of the bands. It seems that nobody's interested in creating anything unique. People just want to follow the trends and satisfy themselves by doing something they know there's already an audience for. Those power metal records are like pop records. They start off with one really catchy hit song and then just goes downwards through the album. It's really nothing to write home about. The same thing happened to the death metal scene years ago, it gets overcrowded and it started to die out, and I guess the same thing will happen to the heavy metal scene again. I really like the



fact that it's legal again in the last five years to like the old heavy metal again though. You don't have to hide the fact that you like stuff like HALFORD and IRON MAIDEN. I think that's cool.

Some of it's good. But there's a lot of it that... it's just crap. Objectively listening to a CD, the playing's fine, the production's fine, it's not a bad album, but you can't very well say, "These two hundred power metal albums are all great, go buy them!"

Nobody really needs it, you know? I'm more into the hard hitting American power metal bands. NEVERMORE is one of my all time favorite bands. A band like JAG PANZER is pretty cool. But all the Dungeons and Dragons metal coming from Sweden and Germany and south of Europe, it's too much for me.

What did you think of the DREAM EVIL album?

I saw them live, we performed at a Swedish rock festival together. I've never heard the album. It was a funny live show.

Have you heard the FIREWIND album?

I think it's in that pile of CDs over there. I just got it today. Here it is! *Between Heaven and Hell*.

Perfect example for me, the guitar player is great. He really knows his shit. Singer is great. The drummer... all the playing is great. But it's been there, done that so many times...

Yeah, I'm just looking at the cover artwork. I guess it'll take a couple of weeks and it'll be one of those records I listen to just before deadline. <laughs> It doesn't look like it holds any surprises, at least.

What's going to save heavy metal from this?

A band like AURORA. A band like PAIN OF SALVATION. A band that has something in their minds, in their hearts, that bring something new to the listener. Who are able to produce albums that don't sound the same. I don't know how many people buy these power metal albums. I don't know how many people run down to the store to buy the new FIREWIND. I don't know any people who buys these albums. I think the scene will kill itself again and the strong bands will still survive I guess.

Which are going to be the same bands that were there before the boom anyway.

Yeah! But it's sad when a band deserves the attention, but you know it will never reach the surface because the listeners are drowned in piles of shit records. I guess that's one of my main motivations for writing for Metalized, that is to get a chance to promote the more unique bands and give people a chance to hear those bands.

Who's to blame for this? The people signing and releasing this kind of thing, or the people who obviously are still buying them?

The labels, definitely. You can't blame the musicians. I guess if people want a record deal, some people choose the easy way. I just wouldn't find that satisfying. I would find it pointless, I wouldn't want to waste my energy. Most of these new bands can't make a living out of it anyways, so there's really no point in selling out in a scene where you can't earn money anyway! So I really don't know why the musicians are doing that. Of course the music fans can listen to whoever they want, I really don't believe there are a lot of people buying those cliché records. I can't believe people have the money to buy all those so-called true metal CDs.

I guess it makes sense from a label manager's standpoint. "There's so many people buying HAMMERFALL CDs. If we can get just ten percent of those, we can make a good deal of money off this album this month!"

Yeah! And they are killing the market. A label like Nuclear Blast is pretty good at that. I guess I shouldn't say things like that if I want to get a better record deal one day. They did the same thing to the death metal scene, the melodic death metal scene, now they are doing it to the power metal scene. I don't know what comes next, I guess it's the new thrash scene.

If you're a big record label, isn't it your job to find those trends and make money off of them? A big vicious cycle there. In this age of the internet, what value does an actual printed magazine still have?

It's more convenient reading it at the toilet. I guess that's a good sales point. Maybe I'm old fashioned, but I like to buy those magazines.

What five albums are you enjoying lately?

The new David Bowie album, *Heathen*, I really love that album. I also love his *Outside* album from 94. Great songwriting, great musicians, it's everything I look for in a record. The songs are varied, they don't sound the same. There's some rock and roll and some ambient stuff. That's my favorite record right now. I just received some SAVATAGE reissues so I'm listening to *Streets* a lot at the moment. Definitely the best SAVATAGE albums of all time. Tonight He Grins Again is really one of my favorites, nice track. I'm always listening to a lot of PAIN OF SALVATION. I've been listening to a lot of *Entropia* lately. I'm still listening a lot to *Remedy Lane*. The new HALFORD, *Crucible*, that's one of the heavy metal records that the world really needed. That really fills a void in the metal scene. It's not groundbreaking but it's so well done that it is an essential heavy metal record. I'm also listening to A-HA, the Norwegian pop band. I saw them live with my girlfriend about a month ago with my girlfriend, and since then I've been listening to them a lot, especially their 86 album *Scoundrel Days*. I don't know why A-HA was labeled as almost a boy band or something, an album like *Scoundrel Days*, both music and lyrics it's so dark, it's almost got a gothic feeling to it. It's well written, so full of emotion. That's a huge album. Melody-wise, that's one of those bands that can really inspire me. The vocalist Morten Harket, he has got one of the greatest voices of all-time I think.

Any final words?

If you're into something unique, if you're into extreme and melodic metal, you should check out *Dead Electric Nightmares*. It's a good album, and I've got reviews to prove that. <laughs>

Discography

Eos (1998 Serious)

Sadian (1999 Serious)

Devotion (2000 Serious)

Dead Electric Nightmares (2002 Lucretia)

Contact

anders@aurora.ms

www.aurora.ms

www.intromental.com

www.seriousentertainment.dk

www.lucretiarecords.com

dumb in English that could be found on a pasta metal album about Valhalla, you know? There are two songs in English, *The Giant's Laughter* and *The Voyager* (here combined with the usual), and wouldn't you know it, that's where the chorus of the songs are done with clean vocals. How's that for aiding in singalongs? Daniel Bergstrand's production is superb, and even though he's best known for harsher bands (SYL, MES HUGGAH) and hasn't come through on more melodic ones at times (new NOCTURNAL RITES), the sound here is absolutely perfect. The booklet's great, with convincing band photos (how often do you hear that?), Niklas Sundin artwork that doesn't look like his usual shit, and maybe you can't judge a book by its cover but you can tell when a band is serious about every detail A to Z when a booklet looks this well thought out and complete. Except for translations into English, but ah well. And Kimmy Sjölund must be a king. He hasn't got shit all over him. So the band expands into more diverse areas without ever losing the roots and feeling of the 'Viking metal' they started out with. A very, very good album that just may be the more grounded alternative who were a bit lost by the likes of ENSLAVED or VINTERSORG escaping into outer space... But damn, is that new logo for the birds, or what? www.thyfing.com

==Entreaty to Metal Muses==

by Matthew Harper

"A beginning is the time for taking the most delicate care that the balances are correct."— Princess Irulan Corrino from Frank Herbert's *Dune*

This beginning must start with an introduction. My name is Matthew Harper, and it's my job to pad out these pages with interesting commentary about metal music. I'm not exactly new to music media: I had a radio show down here in Baton Rouge, Louisiana and played progressive metal and rock for the ungrateful masses and a few grateful listeners. Before that I wrote lots of reviews online and even had some meager influence in helping start the buzz on some bands that later became popular. Those things are really not what I want to tell you about. In order to get the most out of my columns and my reviews, you need to know where I'm coming from, what my musical story is. Then you can know whether to trust my views and comments, as you've come to trust (or distrust?) Jim's.

I'm twenty-four years old, so I wasn't around when JUDAS PRIEST had their first tour of RAINBOW was formed. Nor can I remember METALLICA's *No Life till Leather* demo days, or even when IRON MAIDEN were at their legendary peak with *Powerslave*. The house where I grew up in Montgomery, Alabama, was a good one, but it lacked almost all forms of music. My parents might try telling you they enjoy music, but they really aren't too interested in it. My mother's interest in music waned around the time LED ZEPPELIN was just becoming huge in America, and her favorite rock musicians were the BEATLES and Elvis. My father thought he learned all he needed to know about music in his college years, spending time in a listening room

absorbing the classics, though with how much of an ear for the music I may never know. Still, my house growing up was free of music.

At some point I started listening to the radio. An avid seven year old taping the top 40 and filling his head with pop music: I just didn't know any better at the time. As skateboarding got so popular it began reaching into even the deep South, children and teenagers in my neighborhood started to skate. Though I never had anything but an utterly lame Nash plastic skateboard, and I cracked a tooth after rolling over an extension cord, I did get one good thing out of skateboarding: I saw the names of bands on local teenagers' decks. Names like METALLICA, ANTHRAX, MEGADETH—I was fascinated by the hand-drawn logos. Around that time we used to sneak off to the game arcade, and one older guy there, who wore a black trenchcoat and had long hair and who towered above us, gave my friend some tapes. Maybe he upgraded to CDs?

There were four tapes. METALLICA—*And Justice for All*. IRON MAIDEN—*Somewhere in Time*. ANTHRAX—*State of Euphoria*. WASP—*The Headless Children*. I was twelve years old, and I had found music that was everything I wanted in music but had been somehow missing without knowing it before. Metal somehow matched the hand-me-down science fiction novels my father started me reading when I was nine. The same epic grandeur, the same uncompromising intensity. Pop music got dropped from my listening habits like a stale donut, and I began picking up every METALLICA and IRON MAIDEN tape I could find and afford with my allowance or holiday or money. The ANTHRAX album didn't really catch on with me much, but I did always enjoy *The Headless Children*, though I wouldn't think to get my own copy for many years.

As a young teenager dedicated to metal music, I started expanding my listening experiences. Of course MTV still played the Headbanger's Ball back then, though I suppose it was in decline, and I discovered FAITH NO MORE, DANZIG, TOOL, QUEENSRYCHE, MEGADETH, and a band called DREAM THEATER who played music that blew me away like MAIDEN and METALLICA had done a few years before. I also went to the music stores and bought tapes simply based on their cover artwork, band name, and track listings. I was looking for more epic metal music, and I found SAVATAGE, early FATES WARNING, MANOWAR, ICED EARTH (back in the days of *Night of the Stormrider*), FLOTSAM AND JETSAM, and others without the aid of anyone. Of course, I found a few things I didn't like by buying that way, such as BOLT THROWER, whose artwork was deceptively like MANOWAR's.

As I stepped with time through the grades from junior high to high school, I found *Metal Maniacs* (as it was then, a promising place to hear about great music). My first purchase based on fascinating reviews was AMORPHIS *Tales from the Thousand Lakes*. I had heard death metal before, like OBITUARY and DEICIDE, and never could tolerate it. Suddenly I was

grab me. Sure, there's good parts all over this thing (chorus to Mirror Mirror Life After Life, and parts of Rainwalker especially), but they don't often lock a groove in and just when you're getting into a passage, it's gone. Almost like the most annoying traits of progressive metal, except it's certainly not that kind of technical changing, it's just varied (and fairly jumbled) songwriting, if that makes sense. It's not totally different than how JAG PANZER spices their albums up from 'American metal' to 'Worldwide greats', but somehow Steel Prophet can't convince me. Objectively, it's a well above average band by most standards I hold. It's 100% metal, it's creative, well played, yet I have never liked the sound of any of their albums I've heard (all of the Nuclear Blast albums) and so now this is the fourth time I have to apologize for not liking them. The weak point's definitely the singer for sure, which is easy to say now that he's gone (the band had a big shakeout right before the press started for this album) but at ProgPower last year the guy was piercing my eardrums live with his shrieking, and his vocals have never excited me, for various reasons throughout these last four albums. And although all I have is the promo version, reports have come out that the full version doesn't have the lyrics in it. Well skippity doo da, that's pretty awesome for an album that gets intense when talking about what sounds like Nazis or the KKK or something and drops a 'faggots, jews, and niggers' line, you know? (There is a black guy in the band so there's zero chance those lyrics are overly ignorant or at all racist, I should point out for those who don't know.) In the end, this material just doesn't act like it wants me to listen to it. It sounds like it wants to be left alone. Another pass, unfortunately, for the underachieving band. www.metalprovider.com/steelprophet/

creative endeavor. Quiz time: What does THY MAJESTIE give us that is different than any of those bands I listed? OK, what does THY MAJESTIE give us that's better than most, some, or any of those bands listed? Can you tell I'm just bored enough with this album to not properly review it? OK. Seriously, here's a proper review: Italian power metal. That's it, that's all anyone really needs to know, and I defy anyone to prove those three words don't sum this thing up. If a band does something already done before, they'd better have a sharp sense of melody (in the case of power metal anyway) and they'd better have songs that rock my socks off. Yes, you'll hear me complain about that lots and lots on power metal reviews, but really, I do believe that every additional album released in this style, without challenging the style, cheapens the style and leads to its demise. THY MAJESTIE is just another band, and while there's no shame in liking a band that there's nothing wrong with in and of itself, the 'same old same old' isn't anything you should be seeking out, and every album like this kills the longevity of power metal in general. So now I'm calling THY MAJESTIE a band of murderers. They're killing their style for the lack of having anything to personally express. And people will buy it and like it for the fact that it doesn't suck. For the love of metal, please, make it stop. www.thymajestie.com

=====REVIEW=====



THYRFING *Vansinnesvisor*
8-42:58 Hammerheart

Viking metal. And finally I have an album this issue I can wholeheartedly enjoy and recommend. *Vansinnesvisor* (Insanity Songs or similar) is simply the best and most complete album THYRFING's done to this point. The composition, production, and attention to detail to the point that the booklet it inspiring are all major league, and to me this is the album to move THYRFING from 'essential band of their category' to 'essential metal.' The album at its core is mid-paced full-on atmospheric metal (and I'm not counting keyboards yet; this is just what they accomplish with guitars and drums alone. Excellent, excellent songwriting and arrangement) recalling the vibe of MITHOTYN/FALCONER or mid-ENSLAVED with the extras like keyboards and acoustic guitar and even the vocals adding to the whole, not there to compensate for any shortcomings in the songs. There are many simply inspiring passages, such as the charge in *Vansinnesvisor*, that very odd introduction to The Giant's Laughter, the entire folky vibe of Väldsspeglar. That song just rules it! Lyrically it's still all Vikings and Odin and such I'm guessing, but most of the lyrics are in Swedish (although I had the titles translated for me), but in a way that's cool too because if you can't understand it anyway with the vocals... and the language gives the subject matter a bit more authenticity and less opportunity to say something



THY MAJESTIE Hastings 1066
14- 55:36 Scarlet

Pasta metal. BLIND GUARDIAN, GAMMA RAY, FALCONER, IRON SAVIOR, RHAPSODY, JAG PANZER, LOST HORIZON, VIRGIN STEELE, PRIMAL FEAR, THE LORD WEIRD SLOUGH FEG, TWISTED TOWER DIRE, DREAM EVIL, TAD MOROSE, RAGE, BRAINSTORM. Fifteen power metal bands I consider to be better than THY MAJESTIE. If we go to public opinion, we can add ICED EARTH, HAMMERFALL, STRATOVARUS, SONATA ARCTICA, EDGUY, NOCTURNAL RITES, SINERGY, GRAVE DIGGER, MANOWAR, Yngwie Malmsteen. Twenty-five bands that are popular, good, or both. No, they're not all the same exact style, but that's the point. Naming twenty-five pasta metal bands sounding just like this would be a complete waste of my will to live. Point is a scene should be made up of a variety of bands with a variety of styles, so people have choices and artists are flexing their creativity. Having a formula turns music into widget-making or shoe-shining or some very-not-

====FEATURE INTERVIEW==



Awhile back I reviewed HAGEN's (and that's pronounced Hay-ghen) debut album *Corridors of Time*, describing it as a fantastic blend of DEEP PURPLE styled hard rock and mixed with folk music, but still coming across as fresh and not a throwback band. I needed to know what the hell was behind this, so an interview was necessary. Hans Rosén, bassist and co-writer of the music, and Michael Ohlsson, vocalist and lyricist, called my up a couple months back (yeah, I'm behind...) to get me a little bit more involved in HAGEN's world. Turned out to be pretty good, and interesting as Hans wanted to stick to just the facts and Michael wanted to have some fun with things. I really didn't know anything about the band or its members besides what I heard on the CD, so an introductory question was necessary...

Who are you people? Why are you on my phone?

Hans Rosén: We are Swedish guys. In Sweden, there are a lot of traditions leaving. Folk music is very alive. Me and Michael here have been playing together for many years...

Michael Ohlsson: Ten, actually...

HR: ... in hard rock bands. My brother Anders is a folk musician, and one day outside his house we just got inspired and thought why not try to put these styles together? Me from hard rock, him from the folk music scene.

MO: I've been singing and playing since I was seven, that's the first time I was on stage, as a drummer actually. I've been playing since. I'm kind of a collector when it comes to music. I collected vinyl before, and now I collect CDs. I'm interested in all kinds of musical styles, as long as it's good. I've tried to sing and play many styles over the years. I thought now it's time to do some folk music. I tried it myself in a band earlier, but then I got this tape from Hans and Anders and it was all instrumental and they asked me to try write some lyrics and make some melodies to this stuff. At first I thought how the hell am I going to make this work? After a couple of songs both Anders and Hans thought it was very good. So I got involved and was on board the ship HAGEN.

HR: The reason for calling Michael, I know Michael is the best!

MO: And I always answer the phone.

Who else had you heard going into this style before?

HR: In Sweden there are some bands mixing the styles, called HEDNINGARNA and GARMARNA, but I haven't listened to much to them. They're not for me. We decided to try to do something to meld the styles together. The other bands in Sweden, I think, you can hear a folk side standing in one corner of the room, and in the next corner, you have the hard rock band. It's never put together in a nice way. That was our first decision. It would be put together in a new kind of way.

MO: And most are instrumental. They have never added this rock style and melodies and vocals to it.

HR: And never English vocals. Most often, they are guys from the musical universities who have learned to do this stuff, and it's not real actually.

Have you heard bands like SKYCLAD or OTYG?

HR: I heard of SKYCLAD after reading some reviews of HAGEN. I'd never heard them before.

MO: Me neither, and I haven't heard them yet! When I was a teenager, I listened to bands like JETHRO TULL and they kind of mixed folk music to rock and roll. They did it very well.

HR: Not to forget our keyboard player's old band KAIPA, that band inspired me a lot when I was a teenager. They mix folk music and rock music in a very good way I think.

I just got their new album a few months ago.

HR: You should listen to their earlier albums, from the mid 70s.

Why is it to you that there's value in mixing this heavy metal and hard rock with the folk music in the first place?

MO: It's our roots. It doesn't matter if we like it or not, we are brought up on Swedish folklore. I really like some stuff, even as a kid. There were some groups in the late 60s trying to mix Swedish folk and electric guitars. I really like that. It has to do with the melancholy way of living. We are melancholic here in Sweden, and I think you can hear that in the folklore. That's part of me as a human being.

HR: I think it's in our genes.

MO: It's in my pants!

HR: Well, OK. It's a very strong tradition living here, and I guess all Swedish people hear this tradition.

MO: So why not update it a little bit?

HR: It's beautiful music. My grandmother sang it to me when I was a little baby, and I heard it all my life. When I became a hard rock musician, it was obvious in some way.

MO: It always reminds you of traditions and Swedish nature, the wilderness and the forests and the falls. I can hear it in the music, the nature. Most Swedes I guess can do that.

HR: The other bands combining it are very popular in Sweden...

MO: But we are not. <laughs>

I was surprised that you started off the CD with a slower song. That's something not everyone else in the world does.

HR: We had a long discussion with our label about this. We wanted to start the album with some kind of statement showing what we're doing. The record company wanted us to do a prelude, that's the word he used. After awhile we agreed, and now we think it's great. It's different to start off with a song like that.

You guys seem to be older than the usual bands out there trying to make a name for themselves. You just don't see people with grey hair being in a band these days.

HR: I play regularly with a folk fiddler in Sweden. He's eighty-one years old, and he's been a musical companion for years. Why not? This pop scene that you can see on MTV is not our scene.

MO: The grey hair is normal! It shows you're a little bit older and a little bit more experienced, perhaps. If you can put that into the music, I think that's a good thing.

HR: Some people are slowing down as they are growing old, and they are satisfied with their lives and they don't dare to do anything extra.

MO: Especially if they have been successful as a boy band, then they can settle down and be grey-haired. But I think you would be able to dare when you are experienced. To me, that's more normal.

HR: Maybe the most serious guys are grey-haired. <laughs>

I don't care. The music's good, so I don't care what you guys look like. Problem is, the people I'm writing for, most of them are younger than I am, some are teenagers themselves...

MO: How old are you?

I'm twenty-seven. I'm just worried what someone might think if they look at the website or something and see guys old enough to be their dad.

HR: Half the band is younger than you! Well not really half.

Do you have any idea who the audience will be for your music ahead of time?

HR: When I and my brother had started this thing, the idea was to put hard rock into it. The best way was to call younger guys.

MO: So they called me.

HR: <laughs> Yeah. Michael's kind of younger than me. But the guitarist and drummer are much younger, and the way to do it is like the way Miles Davis did it. Call younger musicians and get inspired. That's the way I think.

MO: I don't think age has anything to do with it. You can be a teenager yet an old man in your mind.

HR: I have friends who are ten to fifteen years younger but they look old. The folk fiddler, Wille Toors, is eighty one years old but he's about twenty years old in mental age.

MO: But I understand your point of view. I'm forty years old but still get suggestions from girls in their twenties. I don't think it's a problem, really. <laughs>

What is the basic way that a HAGEN song is constructed?

MO: As I told you, Hans and Anders called me and gave me a cassette of music they wanted me to put vocals, lyrics, and melodies with. That's just this album. The next album won't be created that way.

HR: It will be made... When we started HAGEN, it was just me and my brother, and we just made some structures on the four track. Then the rest of the band came in. Now we are a complete band. The process now will be that all are involved from the beginning. I think that will be much better.

The songs themselves, as far as the lyrical message, what are you trying to get across?

MO: That's a tricky one. I want to write things that are genuine and things I have experienced in different ways. I'm not fond of writing fables or things like that, just making stuff up. I write better when I write from a point of view where I'm involved. To me, that's the only way. It's very hard for me to write about something I don't know anything about, just imagining things.

HR: Without feelings.

MO: Experiences and some stuff maybe a little bit political in some ways. I've written for other bands that way, other CDs that are quite political. If I see something that I don't like, I feel I've got to write about this.

HR: That's how artists work, I think.

MO: Not all of them.

HR: <laughs> To show people what it's all about.

MO: It has to stand for something. That's important to me, to make a stand for things I like or don't like.

One of the more interesting lyrics was for the song Afraid. What inspired those lyrics?

MO: I've actually worked a lot with teenagers. Teenagers in Sweden today are, sad to say, very suicidal. Often depressed. These kids I'm writing about in the lyrics, they exist, but of course they're not called Jenny and Kenny. I've met these youngsters, and it's very sad. I don't know if it's the same problem in the States, but here in Sweden there are many teenagers committing suicide.

Is that a recent problem?

MO: It's been a pattern from the early 90s I think. It's very hard to get a job today as a young man or woman, and it's very hard for them to get through school. I'm a teacher as well.. They need an education and they need a job to get an identity, and they never get a chance. When they are fifteen or sixteen, they are getting this judgment that they're no good, they don't fit.

So what's the solution?

MO: Of course telling them they are good enough. Everybody knows something. Now that we're focusing on the theoretic side of everything. Not everybody can have a PhD. Somebody needs to clean and run the society and pay the PhDs! And you need people who can play and sing and play football! You can't build a society of people with PhDs. That's the wrong way to go. If you're creative and into art, that doesn't mean anything in Swedish schools. It doesn't mean anything if you're good in athletics or in art and I think that's a problem.

We're always told that in Europe, the arts are respected much more.

HR: The government really stands behind us for music. You can rehearse for free, and that's great. That's the reason for what you call the Swedish musical wonder.

MO: But in school, nobody scratches your back in you are a good painter or a good singer. That doesn't count.

HR: The only things that are important are math or language. And if you're not good at it, you can't go to higher education. It has to be more individual, you have to take care of the individual talents.

Moving on to the other song that I really have question about as far as the lyrics would be the song Questions.

MO: It's the same old good and dance. It's good and evil, maybe from another point of view.

I like the line, "Satan or Jesus, is it really all the same?"

MO: That's the thing that I've been wondering about for many years. When you become a fanatic, does it matter if you say you are working for Satan or Jesus? Do you understand what I'm saying?

It's an interesting topic these days because we had that court that declared the Pledge of Allegiance unconstitutional because it had 'under God' in it,

guitar player. Jared Anderson's talented as well. Yup, this sure is fast and brutal death metal. You like it fast? Brutal? Well played? Congratulations. Yup. Um. Is there anything else to this? Honestly, this review could have been accurately written after listening to the first song. Listening to all ten really was just for the academic search for a polka part, techno sequence, or a hint of melody which if not found would have compromised the review. Didn't find it. Nor were there any rap vocals, acoustic guitar, synthesizer solos, farting sounds, bunnies jumping out of top hats, or anything to break up the monotonous blur. Maybe that weird guitar riffing in closer Powers That Be, but finding the skeleton on one song on an album interesting certainly doesn't make the album any good. I hope people don't still wonder why MORBID ANGEL slowed down on their last album. So far, the most interesting thing about the band would be the album titles. *Conquering the Throne* last time, *King of All Kings* this time? Telling a story, eh? Anyway, certainly can't fault the performances or the production. The songwriting and intent, well, honestly, besides declaring (again) their love of death metal, exactly why does this CD need to exist and what could they possibly find interesting in this, versus what near twenty years of death metal history has already given to us? Listening to *King of All Kings* forces the question yet can give no answer. www.hateeternal.com

=====REVIEW=====



HEIMDALL The Almighty

9- 44:34 Scarlet

Power metal. Yes, this is Italian power metal but it's a bit better than most as it is heavier on the guitar, and the singer has a more reasonable voice than most of the note grabbers. Not that the band gets a free ride from me simply for the fact that it's a metal band with guitar presence. In all, it's just another album. Let's count the ways. The cover art's not too hot, as to me a cartoonish look is death, and frankly those mean looking faces take away from the effect that the background image might have had if it was the cover all by itself. We open up with double bass and a guitar melody, and I wouldn't want to say that this record is identifiable as just an OK album as the first vocal hits, but these bands usually put their first foot forward and start off with the best song they've got. If this is the best they've got, they're in trouble. The vocalist certainly can't do very much with his voice, as all of his singing sounds the same, and he doesn't go up for any notes, or create varying melodies or do anything other than sing the same old power metal vocals over the same old power metal music. Second song starts off with piano and more tender singing and just as I'd be reaching for the skip button they pick it up into some frickin metal, but to me this thing is doomed to hell because it's the rhythm guitar being all heavy and riffy, and keyboards on top of that creating melody.

Very standard stuff, and excruciating as I don't mind the keyboards, but the formulas have been done and I'm going to puke at how standard the transitions from verse to chorus are, and as the songs pass by, I wonder exactly what goes through the minds of musicians who spend so much time to have no identity. The only points where I'll start calling this acceptable on the creative end is at times like on the open to Godhall, where a guitar shows melody when it's not soloing, independent of the keyboards. Then we have a riffing machine, then a melodic guitar line, then they keyboards doing whatever it is they're doing here (not exactly fast fingers there), but they fuck it all up when they're ready for the singing and the promise is gone. Yeah, Wanderer shows some balls, and some cool guitar licks, but then the singer refuses to do anything interesting so the song is no better than what came before. And so it goes. Some good ideas, some decent execution that's been run into the ground in power metal, but absolutely zero in the way of a sound that belongs to them and them alone, and nothing that an established band of the genre needs to look over its shoulder about. These geniuses end up the album with Symit, a very, very soft song that features a capella vocal work, tender acoustic guitar and piano, just basically all the trappings to draw at your heartstrings, but it's a miserable failure and the song just sucks. It's the kind of soft, touching song only a metal band could make because nobody that actually composes or listens to these songs could ever like this. Woof. In the end, it's a decent band that's got their shit together, but these songs are no good for competing on the international stage, and they're no good for making me want to include them in my CD collection on a permanent basis.

=====REVIEW=====



STEEL PROPHET Unseen

12- 51:15 Nuclear Blast

Heavy metal. I really, really hate reviewing STEEL PROPHET albums. They are not a bad band, not at all, but they consistently put forth albums that go in one ear and out the other. I can neither fully explain it (a successful reviewer that I am) nor understand it, but here's the old college try. The first problem is more psychological than material, the fact that the band is on Nuclear Blast, home of HAMMERFALL, STRATOVARIUS, and HELLOWEEN, theoretically with access to the same funding that gets shit like SUSPERIA and THUNDERSTONE decent sounding albums, and the production's boring here. Not bad, mind you, but pretty blah. Productions should make it easier to digest the material, not make the material seem duller than it actually is. As far as the songwriting, it's clever, it's not the usual (and not the MAIDEN mocking they've sometimes done in the past), but the songs don't

BASTARD AND ANNOYS THE HELL OUT OF ME. Thank you're your ability to enjoy that high pitched singing as Kiske, Sammet, Andre Matos, Oliver Hartmann, etc are trotted out for you probably determines how much you'd like this once it's put in front of you. Now then, we will face the one thing every music fan absolutely hates: The Truth. I won't doubt for a minute that people can and hum AVANTASIA tunes when they aren't paying attention. But will someone please tell me who is going to ever just be caught singing, "Welcome to Avantasia!" excitedly in public because the moment just caught them? If you were to follow me around as I walk to and from work, you'd randomly hear me just start into Kill the King, Powerslave, Distorting the Medium, Midnight Mountain, etc. Today I was fucking gnarling out Inpropagation for crying out loud! ("... and there's no rest for the dead!") No, I don't do it around people I know because I suck at singing, so I only annoy strangers, and when they look funny at my I flash the metal sign and start chanting "Devy in the corner in his teen years..." I want every one of you who are angry that I'm pissing on this album for no reason to break into out loud song RIGHT NOW of any song on the first AVANTASIA. Do it! I don't care if you're at the record company offices going over press items, I don't care if you're on a crowded bus, I don't care if you're paging through this in an apartment complex mailstop with that hot girl you were hoping to impress sometime right there next to you. SING FOR ME. A full verse, and a chorus, doesn't matter if they're from the same song or not. Do it! If you can, then you should be getting this because the first one obviously hit it for you, so the second one deserves that same attention for sure. But if you can't? Why not? Maybe because it was sonic wallpaper that fooled you into thinking it was good with non-incompetent performances and the dazzle of guest stars. Didn't stick too well, did it, if you can't spit up one verse and one chorus from a fucking ROCK (metal) OPERA. And the story itself is still kind of lame. I mean, the cover's this Fellowship of the Cheese gathering with pointy eared people and lots of wardrobes made of robes, with a tower in the distance that has a huge dollar sign on it. If someone talks to me about deeper meanings here I will take a Tolkki in your shoes, OK? Face it. If you are a fringe fan of power metal, there's far weightier material you'll need to get. That this If you're a power metal maniac die hard son of a bitch, then do you want the cliff notes version of power metal today? Yes, the album's competent in every way except selection of distinct singers. But please believe me that this isn't one of the best power metal albums ever made, and with an 'all-star' cast, shouldn't it at least seem close? Hell, it's not even the best power album reviewed this issue. AYREON was the originator of this whole 'all-star' thing in our realm, he picked the singers carefully, and when all the Geniuses and such started doing the same thing, Arjen took his cast live. One step ahead. The difference between Arjen and Tobias? Tobias has another band playing this style that's neglected because of this. With Arjen, that's what he does, that's all he does. AVANTASIA just rubs me so wrong on many levels even as I might acknowledge "Well that chorus isn't crap." This sounds more like a "Yay us, metal!"

cheerleading exercise than a serious work of art, it takes away from the serious bands who are trying to make it with as much writing and playing skill but without the marquee names and in the end the quality and magnitude and significance of the project is no different than any 'normal' power metal band. If a bunch of people you never heard of made this exact same album, would, should, anyone have gotten so excited? (Now, for the short version of this review: It's not a great album so fuck it.) www.tobiassammet.com

=====REVIEW=====

CENTVRION

CENTVRION *Non Plus Ultra*

10- 53:10 Scarlet

Painkiller metal. I interviewed these guys on their first album. My shame in hyping them in hindsight, but I didn't know the third album would sound like this. Most power metal winds up being a derivative distraction, but this manages to sink to the level of banal trash. It's basically JUDAS PRIEST's *Painkiller*, a bit more meaty and sacrificing the melodic sense that made that album great, not as good of course, and the singer is completely out of control in typical Italian metal singer fashion, except this is distinctly Halford to join in on the PRIEST vibe. It's bad and he craps the album out all by himself because he's got no sense of restraint, and no unique vocal lines either. Suddenly I'm appreciating SILENT FORCE tons more, as they had the decency to be good at the cloning they chose to do. The swerve to this band, of course, is that on their second album they apparently went all thrash with some death vocals and stuff (by review consensus, I've never heard it) so some of that heaviness, including some backing growls, plods on home here, especially by the end of the album when the band sounds its most 'original.' It's not as clueless as FREEDOM CALL's usage, but it's not anything that's going to wake me up from the slumber. The album's uneventful, uncreative, and after suffering through numbers like Megalometal, Soap Opera, and The Crucifier, it's obvious the album doesn't mean much, either. So nice to see these guys play metal with their hand-me-downs from musicians of generations past. So when I liked their debut album, was I deaf? Dumb? Or was it really that much better? Well I don't own it anymore, so that answers that question... www.centvrion.com

=====REVIEW=====

HATE ETERNAL

HATE ETERNAL *King of All Kings*

10- 33:48 Earche

Brutal death metal. HATE ETERNAL is hyperblasting, hyper aggressive death metal. No compromises, no sellout, nothing but brutal death metal. Derek Roddy's a talented drummer. Erik Rutan's certainly a talented

and then there's the scandals with the Catholic priests.

MO: Anything, when you get this mania or hysteria, is always dangerous. No matter the subject.

When you hear about things like the Catholic priests here in America, how do you view that as an outsider?

HR: Well here in Sweden we are not Catholics. We see the Catholic Church as a conservative and closed kind of church. I really don't like the Catholic church. I want progressive stuff. A church to be with the people, to be a part of their life.

One thing I've never understood about most churches. Are they supposed to be serving the congregation or enforcing the law from above? You can't do both at the same time, so which master do you serve?

MO: The church should serve the first master. The church and religion should be something that you can lean on. Get you through when you're having tough times. That's the idea of it, I think.

HR: It should be natural. That's the word for it. Not punishing. A part of the daily life. To me, religion is feeling happy to be part of this wonderful world. When I'm fishing, for example, then I'm really religious. I feel I'm part of this fantastic, wonderful world! That's how the church should be.

MO: I think it's getting a little bit tricky when your call is religion. That's when it's getting a little bit dangerous. When you speak about faith, it should give you strength. It's getting political in a way. They're using it in politics all over the world, they always have been.

HR: Organizations are always dangerous.

MO: You see the problems in Great Britain, with the Protestants and Catholics. What is that all about? To me, it's a political problem. The poor Catholics and the rich Protestants.

HR: I'm personally happy to be buried on this Earth one day. There's going to be growth from me!

What are your favorite songs on the album?

MO: June is my favorite. I had just broke up from a long relationship with a nice girl I'd been together with for almost eight years. By the time I wrote the lyrics, I was in my family's summer house up north in Sweden. We used to stay there on summer vacations, me and my girlfriend. So I woke up one morning and I felt the loss and I really missed her. So I wrote down just exactly what I felt that morning. It's very close to my heart, that song.

HR: I can't choose one song from the album. The process of making it all, all songs have a different meaning in a way, and I love the album. Of course, when Sundown is in the speakers, it rocks! It makes me move my body parts!

MO: You get erected? <everyone laughs>

HR: That's the sexiest song, I think. I love sexy music. Rock music has to be sexy. You have to be erected. <laughs> I think The Northwinds Blow is a nice song. It's a folk song, folk melody. I think that's great. And June too.

MO: Northwinds Blow is connected in a way, I wrote it for my ex-girlfriend.

If you could tell me about the cover art of the album.

MO: I think it's great! To me, it was very strange than an American artist from San Francisco captured the Swedish landscape.

HR: She got our music to listen to...

MO: And that's all. It's very Swedish, the whole concept. Swedish folklore and that part of the tradition is sometimes quite similar to Indian traditions. We have our trolls and our spirits everywhere up in the woods! <laughs>

HR: I don't think we're so far from the Indians.

MO: There's an ocean to cross.

HR: The people in the north of the world, all of those people are quite near to Indian culture. We have Indians in Sweden called Laplanders. Some people say that they are in some way related to the American Indians. It's hard to prove but I can believe it because they look alike.

On the website, you've got the album available for listening [on streaming audio]. A lot of bands and record labels are afraid of that.

HR: I'm the webmaster, and I've been talking to our record label about this. You have to be able to listen to the stuff.

MO: It's quite an investment these days to buy a CD. You have to have the opportunity to listen to it before buying it.

HR: No one will buy a record without having a chance to listen to it before. There are a lot of webshops all over the internet, you can read the text files about all the albums, but who fucking cares? I wouldn't buy a record without listening to it. Especially by a new band like us. That's why. This is a service to people and the quality of the sound is quite a low quality, but it's just so all people can listen to it, from a slow modem connection to whatever you have. I don't know if you've watched our website, but we have songs from Michael's solo album that we were involved in.

MO: Involved in? I hope I'm involved in my own solo album! <laughs> Have you remixed it or what? <laughs>

HR: Shut up. Alright. It's a solo album by Michael, but it was recorded in my studio and I played the bass and some slide guitar. It's available for free download and there's also another album that Michael and I have been doing.

MO: That we recorded ten years ago, NEW CLEAR DAZE.

This album was released last year on Angular Records. I don't know if this is representative of their total promotional efforts, but I hadn't heard of your band until you contacted me. How has your experience been with Angular?

MO: That's a hard one, we still have to be diplomatic. It's a small company, I think it's doing what it can. But of course it would have been nice if they could have promoted us a little bit better. A month ago we got a license deal in Russia. That's very important. The company in Russia is larger, and covers the former Soviet Union. It looks like they are doing a great job. Through that promotion, we will get out in the world.

HR: I've talked to Stefan [Kost] at Angular Records about the US market. We've talked about the possibilities of getting it to the US. It's not so good at the moment, the possibilities of getting licensed.

Do you have any future commitment to Angular?

No.

MO: For our next album, there will be less folk music than on this album. It will be English translations of the Russian poet Vladimir Vysotsky. He was a dissident in the old Soviet union. A half a million people came to his funeral. [Before you think that hyperbole, I did some research and some news reports say that number was over one million... ed.] He was huge. There will be more vocals and less folk, but we won't forget who we are, but it will sound different from this album.

(...and then my tape recorder started futzing again, but luckily all I missed here was the 'five albums thing, where the biggest revelation is that Michael has seventy frickin' Frank Zappa albums,, and of course the final remarks. Do you need em? Go to the website and check out the songs, damn it. How's that for MYfinal words?)

Discography

with HAGEN:
Corridors of Time (2001 Angular, re-released 2002 CD Maximum)

with NEW CLEAR DAZE:
Selling Diamonds on the Edge of Time (1993 MN Contact)

Hans Rosén
Brynäsgränd 16
802 84 Gävle
SWEDEN
hrn@bredband.net
www.hagen.nu
www.angular-records.com/
www.cd-maximum.ru/

NEWS and views

IRON MAIDEN

Get your wallets out, metal fans, as IRON MAIDEN and their Sanctuary management are out to ream you yet again. MAIDEN announced the November release of... a new album? Aw, hell no. Another special edition rarities and neat stuff in a cool box OhMyGod piece of crap money wasting venture that's designed to separate you from your money with exactly zero (0) effort from the band but plenty of wry smiles from their marketers.

Eddie's Archive and Edward the Great are coming. Edward the Great is a best-of, with the big deal being that it will be advertised on television. BFD. Eddie's Archive is a six CD set (well, three double CDs if you want to be picky about it) featuring live sets from 1979, 1980, 1982, 1988, and a full double CD commemorating another 1982 set. Yes, IRON MAIDEN fans want to hear the song Iron Maiden five times in one box set! Number of the Beast and Hallowed Be Thy Name three times! Tons more twice! Where's my wallet? Also in the archive is a double CD Best of the B'Sides, which means to get to the two CDs worth of songs you don't have (obviously missed out on those mid 90s reissues, did you? Poor bastard...) you'd have to buy four CDs of songs you do. Value for money! Can we just blow up 45-53 Sinclair Road and be done with it? Please?

Now, I'm just assuming that anyone who actually likes Iron Maiden already has all of their albums, because after three highly publicized reissues in six years, how could you not? And if you don't have them, why would you want a big ass box set with multiple versions of the same songs as the actual copy you own?

The price was not mentioned in the 'news' item, but it wouldn't surprise me if it was just over a hundred bajillion dollars.

And the press release even gets insulting. "For the avoidance of any doubt, we will also make the amazing new themed Edward the Great artwork available as a free download from our website for our fans as we would not want them to feel obliged to buy a series of tracks they already have in their collection just to get the packaging." Oh thank you gracious bastards. Give us some free artwork but require us to buy a bunch of albums we already have to get an EP we maybe don't? That *Soundhouse Tapes* fiasco was a mere six months ago, memories aren't that short. Or in this case, make us buy a boatload of live material to get at some rare studio material? Bastards.

No word on the rumor that Rod Smallwood eats babies bought with the profit of thick-headed die hard IRON MAIDEN fans. Or the rumor that SISTHEMA will soon be releasing a four CD retrospective followed next year by a triple DVD set showcasing their history and making of their Noise album, to be released in a special moustache shaped box.

This is why even the hint of success is rejected in the underground.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Some more HAMMERFALL news to follow-up last week's bad news. The band will be touring with DIO late this year in the States. They have also named their warrior knight mascot, Hector. Wow, so epic... Metal Mind out of Poland is releasing *Historica*, covering the history of the band BEHEMOTH. In their sales sheet, it's listed as "Region Code 0, Plays On All Regions 1-6." I should hope so, as *Historica* is not a DVD release, but a five album vinyl box set... MARSDUK is giving away "One signed real human skull from Morgan's personal collection." The contest is being run through their site www.marsduk.nu, and I ask that LotFP readers all enter and tell me what charges they're brought up on when customs opens that package up as it comes into the country... Interestingly hilarious GORGOROTH news: "GORGOROTH have entered the studio in their hometown of Bergen, Norway. According to King Ov Hell, "Eight brutal, Satanic tracks have already been recorded." Infernus, King and Kvitrafn have finished their parts and are awaiting the release of Ghaal from prison. He is slated to enter the studio in September when he will get some time off from prison." First off, what kind of marketing scam or brain damage do you have going when your music is self-described as 'Brutal, Satanic.' Man, that's just screaming 'quality!' to me, how bout you? Also, if you're going to commit a crime, lure the victim to Norway for it because their

penal system doesn't exactly seem to be the most effective to me. Time off from jail, and able to record albums? The things you learn from black metal... Kirk Hammett: "So we came in today and we were working on the song Du Jour when Niclas walked in with the new MESHUGGAH CD. We decided to stop what we were doing and throw it on because every motherfucker at Ozzfest kept on telling us how kick ass they were. When we heard it we were shocked to find out how similar it was to our new material, even the 8 radio songs we have." Planet Earth, calling METALLICA. Planet Earth, calling METALLICA. Please come in, METALLICA. Respond, over? And I don't care how rich and successful and out of touch you are or how little time or interest you have in the scene around you. Subscribe to a magazine or two in your genre and read them (or even just look at the pictures) while you're on the shitter and maybe you'd know who bands like MESHUGGAH are a decade before every 'motherfucker at Ozzfest' has to break the news to you.

REVIEW



ABSCESS *Through the Cracks of Death*
11-43:43 Peaceville

Death metal. Whether it's a good or bad thing that Chris Reifert and Danny Corralles never grew up depends on your perspective. As members of AUTOPSY (and Reifert was on DEATH's debut album as well), their death metal pedigree and rights to the style can not be questioned. That *Through the Cracks of Death* is a death metal album, and a pretty filthy one at that, can not be questioned. It is a varied affair (oh I do feel like such a professional writer who deserves a glossy cover around my work when I write such correct phrases as 'varied affair') This shit don't all sound the same. It grinds, sure, but sits more around the mid-paces, sludging around with some SABBATH riffing here and there, really twisting that knife in for songs like Raping the Multiverse, Tomb of the Unknown Junkie, Die For Today, etc. The production enhances the grime, giving it a purposefully muddy coat while still allowing clarity for that which needs it. Even though it's hardly that accurate a statement, 'EYEHATEGOD on puppy uppers' was a thought that demanded to be written once it appeared in my head. Interesting that they solo around the place too, lots of diddydoo, very Slayerish as they just goddamn go for it instead of constructing 'proper' musical solos. I like this approach best and the soloing is what I like best about the album. The album's bloody awful, of course, but I think my type is supposed to think so, and I suspect the target audience for this crap will eat it all up with a spoon and ask for more. Damned coprophagists. Death metal expands the vocabulary though, doesn't it? Go ask your boss what coprophagia is. You'll either get a response of "Huh?" or their face will wrinkle up as the answer dawns on them, so either

way it's good for some laughs. Interesting trivia bit of note. On Peaceville's page with ABSCESS' biography, it contains the following lines: "1999: ABSCESS sign to French label Listenable Records and begin recording the *Tormented* album at Sound Temple studios. 2000: The owner of Sound Temple is evicted and ends up losing all the tapes from the Tormented session." Now, James Murphy was the Sound Temple owner, and the fact that he had some malignant tumors behind his face did indeed cause him to have serious problems personally and professionally before he was even diagnosed as his mental faculties deteriorated (people thought he literally just wigged out and caused a few entire productions to be lost through either pure carelessness or actually ripping bands off). So this timeline is technically true, but also makes Murphy look like a complete idiot at best, and I'm wondering if that's the best way to describe the situation. Not that I should expect class from this bunch judging on their body of work but give a cancer victim a break, OK? If I get run over by a truck tomorrow and they bury me in the ground, can't wait for the internet posts from subscribers complaining that I didn't finish out the rest of the subscription. Anyway, impossible to fault ABSCESS when it comes to heart and integrity, but it is impossible to say the album is something necessary to listeners that don't make it a habit (or a hobby) to puke all over themselves. Completely degenerate music, which I'm almost positive they'd be happy to agree with. My question is, just as I wonder if proggy bands are capable of getting down and dirty, is Reifert capable of doing anything more majestic and regal? Mmm? Not that it matters what my opinion of them or their music is, because the album's a success.

REVIEW



AVANTASIA *The Metal Opera Part II*
12- 68:17 Century Media/AFM

Euro Power metal. So what do Tobias Sammet's AVANTASIA and Nikolai Kotzev's *Nostradamus* have in common? They both take some of the best known, best regarded, and famous voices from their musical scenes and fail to realize that side by side, THEY ALL SOUND THE SAME. On *Nostradamus*, it was Alannah Myles, Jorn Lande, and a bunch of legends you couldn't tell apart, and on AVANTASIA, it's Sharon Den Adel, David Defeis, and a bunch of guys who either are or sound like Michael Kiske. Anyway, the good: The Seven Angels is one hell of an opener. Almost fifteen minutes long, marching through the singers, it showcases everyone, and it even has a Meatloaf interlude so absurd that it works. Big and epic, although let's not pretend it comes anywhere close to And Then There Was Silence if we're talking fifteen minute metal epics. The good Seven Angels EP with a load of crappy power metal bonus tracks, featuring way too many ballad parts, we could call this. And now, an announcement: MICHAEL KISKE IS A WHINY