

HARD HIT

VOLUME 5

JANUARY 2024



In this issue:

Interview
Johannes
Persson
(Cult of Luna)

—
Interview
Nick DiSalvo
(Elder)

—
Live Photos

COVER STORY

To a heavy new year

Welcome back,

My only new years resolution was this: Write for the magazine. So there you go.

In some ways volume 5 is actually Volume 4.2. Because the interviews and photos were taken during the same time period last year. It was exiting to see how much material I had at the end of the year and that I could spread it out over three volumes if I wanted to (and probably have to). There are still many, many pictures from Desertfest Antwerp that deserve to be in here.

But I prioritized the interviews. The conversations with Johannes and Nick were similar in a way that both are the masterminds of their bands and founding members. They both dedicate their lives to music and I admire that. Talking about the art of album covers was fun. They are very eloquent and precise in articulating their artistic vision. Apart from that talking about musical details and getting such an inside look on a music group was impressive.

Also, from now one there is gonna be a playlist with all the bands that are talked about in each issue of the magazine. These different music styles add up to a wild, colorful and exciting mix. I hope you will discover some new bands through it.

Enjoy reading the interviews!

INTERVIEW

JOHANNES PERSSON

I meet with a tired but chatty Johannes before his show with Cult of Luna at Desertfest Antwerp. The Swed shared some funny stories aside. Like when the band started and local organizers expected "six two-meter-cavemen" but instead they faced members that looked like they play indie pop. We talked about the newest record, his vocal talent and album covers. You can watch the recorded version of this interview on [YouTube](#).



**Hello Johannes,
You released a new record last
year The Long Road North. What's
your favorite song of the record?**

It's hard to answer because all the songs, they have different missions to complete the whole album. Some songs you love playing live more than others. For example I love playing Silver Arc. Maybe it's not the best song but I love playing it. It's really fun. And I also love the subject matter of the lyrics Cold Burn is I think that's a song that you felt like: "okay this is the one that's going to open the album." We had not only the opportunity but privilege to work with Colin Stetson and Mariam [Wallentin] and all these guest artist. I love Colin's take on the Beyond, I love Miriam's take on it. I'm going to give you the boring answer. I love all the songs.

**How was the writing process for
The Long Road North?**

I think it was after we did the record with Julie [Christmas]. We just started writing music. It continued on, continued, continued, continued. It wasn't like usually: you write a bunch of songs, then you go in and record a record and then you start over again. This was like we continued writing. So when we were in the studio recording for A Dawn To Fear, a bunch of the songs that ended up on the Raging River and Long Road North were already written. And then we got out of the studio. We continued to write a few new songs that ended up on the Raging River. And when we recorded a bunch of new songs that ended up on the [Long Road North].

***"Lights have always been
a great way of us
communicating our music
and to elevate it live."***

**You put a lot of effort into your
light for the live shows?!**

We have always from the start. I mean we bought our own floor cans when we started touring 20 years ago. They weren't cheap for a band. Cost maybe like thousand Euros or something like that. which was a lot of money for us and we invested in that. We used to play with only backlights. And so lights have always been a great way of us communicating our music and try to elevate it live. and when you grow bigger, you get a bigger budget. you could have put that money in your pocket. But we didn't. We blew it on lights instead.

And also it's all about us getting to know Alexi [Sevenir] in the 2006 or something. He was a friend of ours that later became a light designer and later became our manager.

So he followed us through all these years. He's like a part of the band. He used to be a light designer. But he quit that. Now he's only a manager. But he does light design for only us.

**You don't tell him how the light
supposed to be?**

I mean we have we have discussions. and sometimes I see music in colors. For example: Finland, it's a green song. So when you play that song it's colored green.





You have a very strong voice and when you sing, you always have a very constant pressure. Is that something that you learned or is that like your natural style of singing?

I've always done some vocals with this band from the start.

But it was after three records I felt like: "okay Klas [Rydberg], our previous vocalist he's like this natural. He just know how to do it. [But] it's just a matter of time until he quits the band. so I better start practicing." He started to teach me the basic of it and I never fully learned how to do it properly so I f__d up my voice all the time.

We did this tour with Julie Christmas and I don't do much vocals and during the US tour I remember waking up and I wasn't able to speak because I f__d up my voice. And I thought: Okay this is not good. If we're going to do this. I need to be able to talk to people. So I actually went to Melissa Cross. She's a vocal trainer for screaming vocalists, pretty much the only one. I went to her like just for two days. We were going at it for like 4 hours straight. and to be honest she didn't teach me something I didn't knew. I mean you know that If you scream from the throat you going to [destroy your voice].

but she was very good in pointing fingers: This is how you should do it. I still don't do it the way you should. I still technically suck. but this is the only way I can do it. A couple of years ago I would probably not do this

interview with you, just to save my voice. I have a cold too. So this is going to be very interesting tonight.

I think I tried to copy Klas' voice and then it just stayed.

So there's the danger that you might destroy your voice, isn't it?

Well that's always there. But at least now I know how not to. I learned how I should prevent it, but I'm not saying that I do.

Speaking of vocalists. how do you find your guest vocalists?

We always approach them. We haven't put a lot of thought into it. very often it's just a basic [idea].

"how about ... ?",

"love that person's voice.",

"so you know, she, you know, that person? don't you know?"

like you ask her. so it's more like you know just [points across the room] ...

Do you think you ever going to make another final light record?

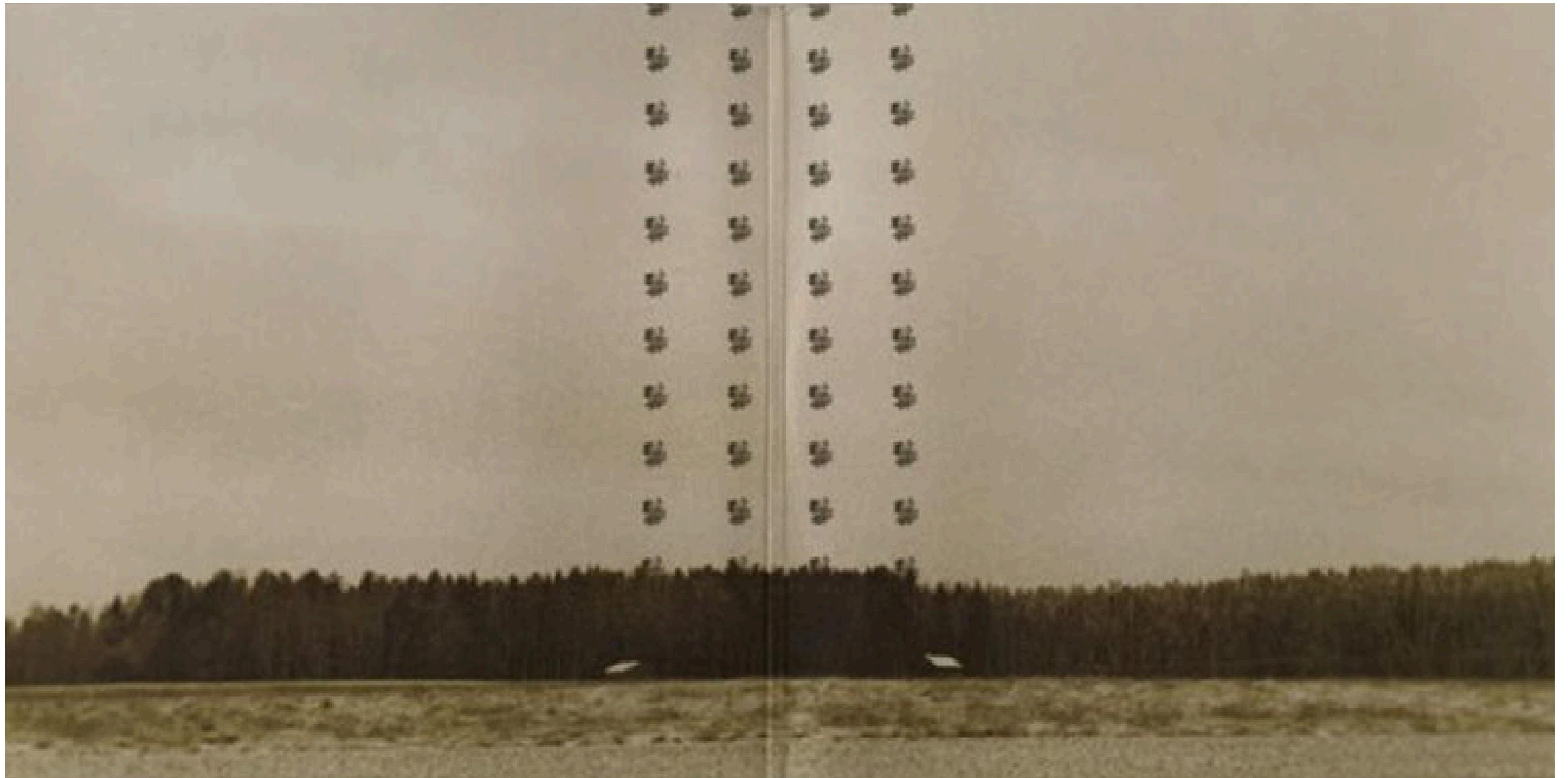
I wouldn't mind and I think James he seemed to be okay with trying it again. Both me and James are very busy people. So to find time to do it, is another [thing]. But you never know.

What's your favourite Cult Of Luna Album Cover?

I think I need to say Somewhere Along The Highway [2006]. For many different reasons. It was such a special period in the bands life and in my life for that matter.

We've tried so many things, many ways to, to do it, do our thing in a different way. And we didn't have much ideas of how to do it with the artwork. How our music would be translated into art. And Erik [Olofsson, former guitarist] is such a an amazing graphic designer and he came up with this amazing idea and in a lot of different versions.





And one thing I love about that cover is, if you have the vinyl and you open it up, the gatefold, you have two barns. It looks like it's a photoshopped picture. Because it's perfect Symmetry. But it's not photoshopped at all. It's such a fantastic symmetric picture. And I drive by those two barns every time

I go with the kids snowboarding. And that's the only idea I have for the next record: That I want to have another picture of those two barns in another season. Because the seasons where we're from change a lot. And so the same picture can be used in different seasons and it's going to be completely different.

What's your favorite album cover in general?

That's an impossible question to answer because it all depends on what kind of music they play. The first Sabbath cover for example is amazing.

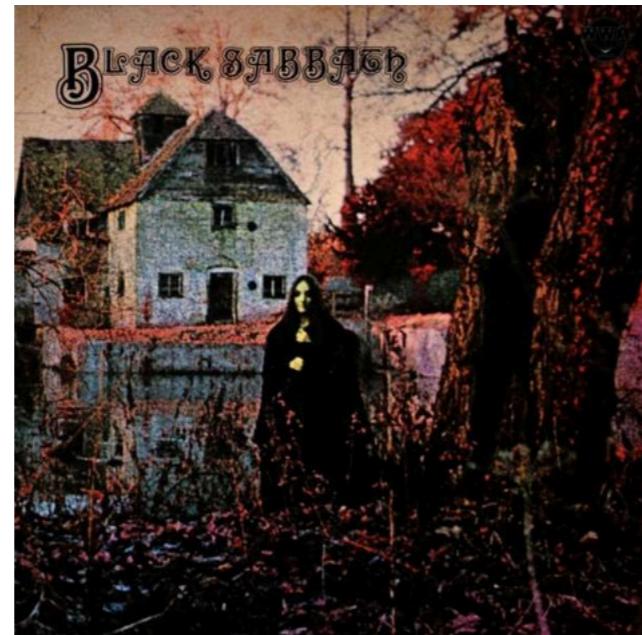
That's interesting cuz when I interviewed Ken Mode the Bass player said the same.

Yeah, I mean, I think a lot of bands don't put enough effort into their artwork. Because for me at least, and I think it actually goes for

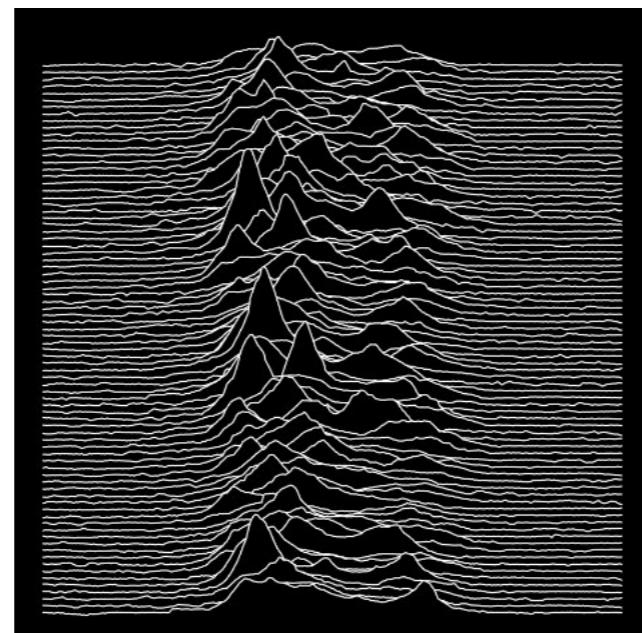
everybody, the artwork decides how you are going to perceive the music. It puts the atmosphere, it creates the world. It is basically a lens of how you watch the music play. Of

course Unknown Pleasures by Joy Division is another one. Bolt Thrower, their music.

There [was] this period of time between '95 until 2010. When Photoshop was new. And people didn't know how to use it. A lot of album cover sucks. But pre the cut and paste era, there were so many Punk albums that [were] amazing: Start Today - Gorilla Biscuits. The Judge - New York crew. but that 7 inch you couldn't use that artwork for any other kind of music. It just fits the music perfectly.



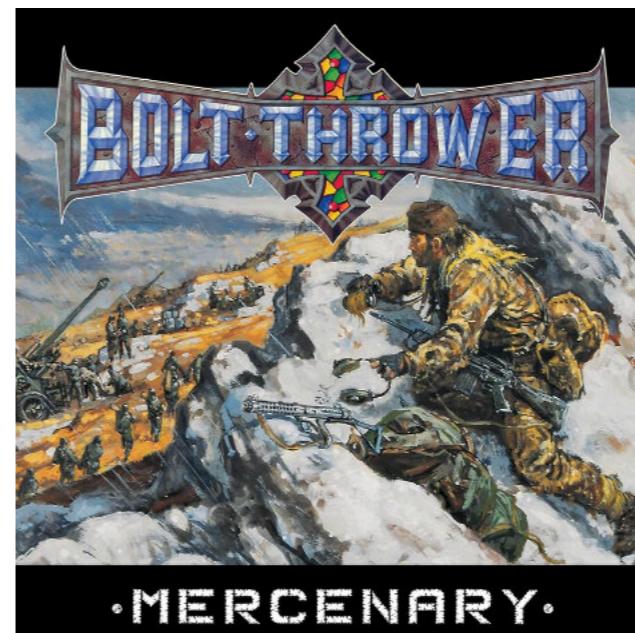
Black Sabbath - Black Sabbath (1970)



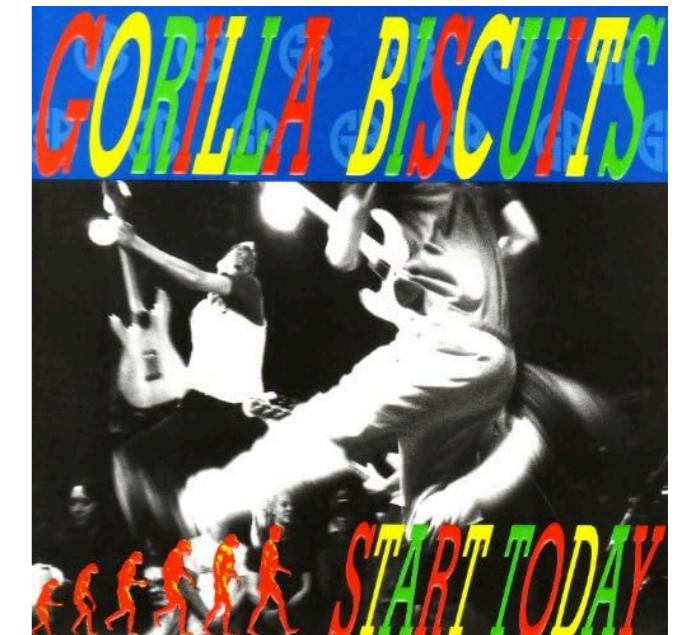
Joy Division - Unknown Pleasures (1979)



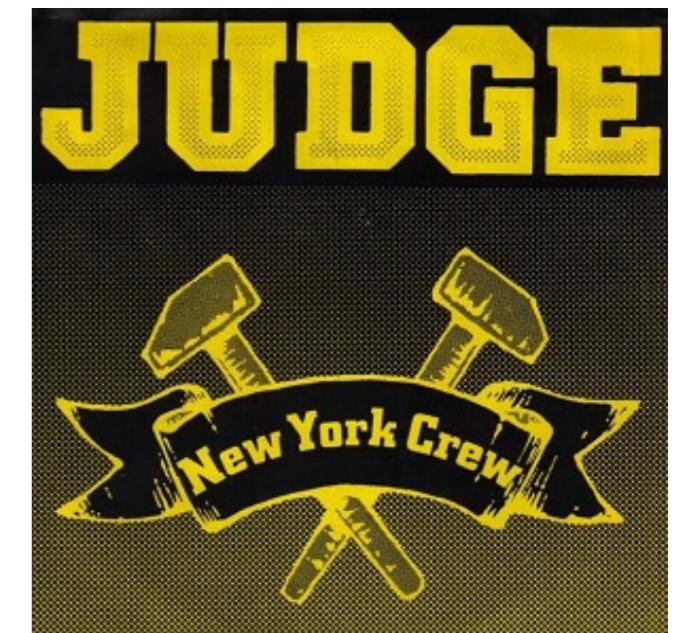
Bolt Thrower - Honor Valour Pride (2001)



Bolt Thrower - Mercenary (1998)



Gorilla Biscuits - Start Today (1989)



Judge - New York Crew (1988)

You work also in movie production, like casting for some movies. how did you get into this area? Did you study movies?

Yes. I moved to Stockholm, started working in the movie business. And like everybody should start, started from the bottom and then I started working as a runner and assistant, stuff like that. Then I got into extras casting. I did extras directing on set, which means you sometimes have to cast smaller parts. And that's how I got into casting and then I did one movie after another and then all of a sudden you're a casting director. It's a fun job, some projects are more fun than others. But I'm lucky that I've been able to do it for 10 years now.

So what's your next movie Project?

That's the thing. Everything I work on I cannot talk about.

But hopefully my producers will be able to finance a script I've written and hopefully they'll be able to finance it, so we can shoot it next year. Yeah, it's a f__d up story.

And what's your next music project?

I've written a lot of music this fall. But not to Cult of Luna, to other artists and right now I'm done with everything. You know, when you have things you need to do and it's always like you have all this weight on your shoulders.

"We will not tour until the next album is out."

"Okay, I cannot start working with Cult of Luna before I write that song to that person and that blah." And now I've done that, so now now I'm free now I can do anything. and that's what I'm really looking forward to. I haven't written a single Riff to Cult of Luna this year [2023].

So the next Cult of Luna record will probably take a bit more time?

Yes for sure. Yeah absolutely. And we will not tour until the next album is out. We will take a shorter break. We don't tour that often, we don't make long tours, but it felt like we gone through Europe now.

And then you have your own Festival Beyond the Redshift, you organize that?

Well, I wouldn't say organized it. I pointed fingers on what bands I want to see. Haydn Britland from northern music kind of organizes it. We might take Beyond The Redshift to other cities with other bands and the basic idea of creating a familiar event where everybody feels like their family, you know that might happen. but we're not going to tour.

Thanks for the interview Johannes!







INTERVIEW NICK DiSALVO

I had the pleasure to interview Nick before his show with Elder on the 17th November in Dresden. The second to last show of their european Tour in the fall of 2023. The guitarist is friendly and super chilled. We talked about the newest Elder record, Album covers, Their upcoming tour with Tool and Black Sabbath. On HardHit's YouTube Channel you find a live record of Gemini and the recorded version of this interview.



ELDER

Hi Nick, How's the tour going?

It was great. It was really well attended I think like a vast majority of the shows sold out and people seem to enjoy the package. We had a really great package with Slomsa for the first like 3/4s of the tour and stake joined us in the UK, and it's been a blast, meet a lot of new friends and made friends with Slomsa guys and yeah I think we could say it's been a success.

So the band started in the US, and then you moved to Germany, so how do you write music together?

We don't really write collectively very much. I write pretty much all of the music to a certain extent and usually record extensively at my own apartment just like a home recording setup. And the three of us who live in Berlin will meet and kind of hash out these ideas in our practice space and when our bassist is ready or when we feel we're ready to record the next record when we've kind of exchanged the ideas and worked through my recordings long enough then we'll fly him over, or I guess depending on where we're going to record we'll meet up for some period of time rehearse the material and then go into the studio, so it's a bit unconventional.

I thought only you live in Berlin, but actually three guys of you live in Berlin?

So three of us can work through ideas. But I'm still the main songwriter. So the distance doesn't really change too terribly much for us.

Why did you want to move to Germany?

I was an exchange student in high school in Germany, and it was a great experience for me. And I came to really feel at home in the country. And it led to me also studying German in college. And I worked as an English teacher in Germany and eventually just relocated permanently. Because I always felt, since that first year, [that] Europe was my home more so than the states. I felt like I fit in better here, and I really like the music scene and the festivals and everything. So there's not really one great reason other than just my like Collective life experience in my early teenage years and 20s.

You really feel at home in Berlin?

yeah, I do. That took some getting used to. I mean I've lived in a couple cities here, but now I've been in Berlin for closing in on a decade. So that's definitely home yeah.



What inspired you to move from riff-based faster Stoner influences to a slower paced more progy sound?

Well I think I'd actually disagree and say that we have if anything picked up a little bit in Tempo over the years. I mean we try to work with a wide variety of dynamics that includes loud to soft and then fast to slow. We're not like playing thrash metal of course, but I think we have some songs that are more uptempo in recent years.

It's just been a natural development as we got bored of playing just kind of simple riffy stuff and the scene really got totally over saturated by just tons of bands doing this kind of stuff, and we've been trying to always evolve and differentiate ourselves.

But also just the pure joy of writing music and being interested in more Progressive music as the years have gone on have just kind of drilled their way into our brains, and it's been a natural thing like we don't spell out or set out any guidelines for what we want to do with a record or a song before we write. Just start, and then you know whatever comes out comes out basically. So not super conscious but yeah we always try to be the different band in the scene.

Maybe after *Reflections Of A Floating World* you were thinking: "Okay we mastered this type of music so why not try something else?"

Yeah, I guess to a certain extent after that record maybe there was the idea to conscious or unconscious to do something a little bit

"We always try to be the different band in the scene."

When I listened to it, it felt a bit like there's still some heaviness, but it's a bit more underneath. So the newest record is a bit more layered.

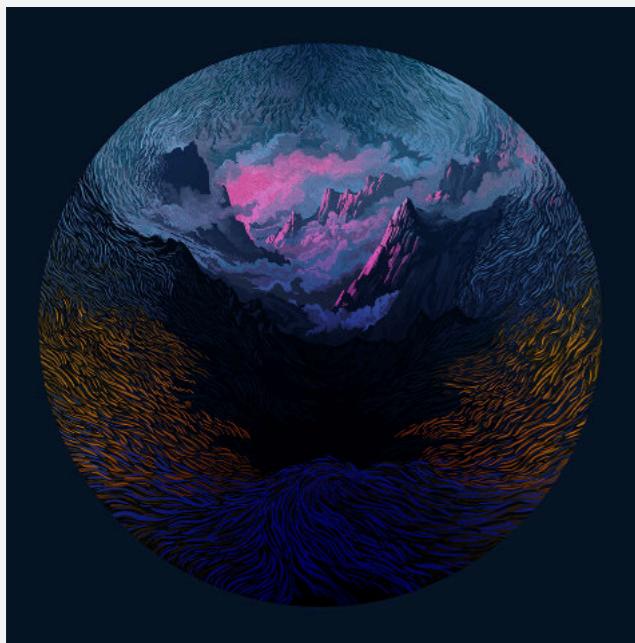
yeah, there's a lot of layers on that record and so the riffs you know they're there, but they're also there are keyboards and there's you know synths and you know vocal harmonies and all sorts of stuff we haven't tried out as well.

Is there a band in particular that inspired your change in style of music?

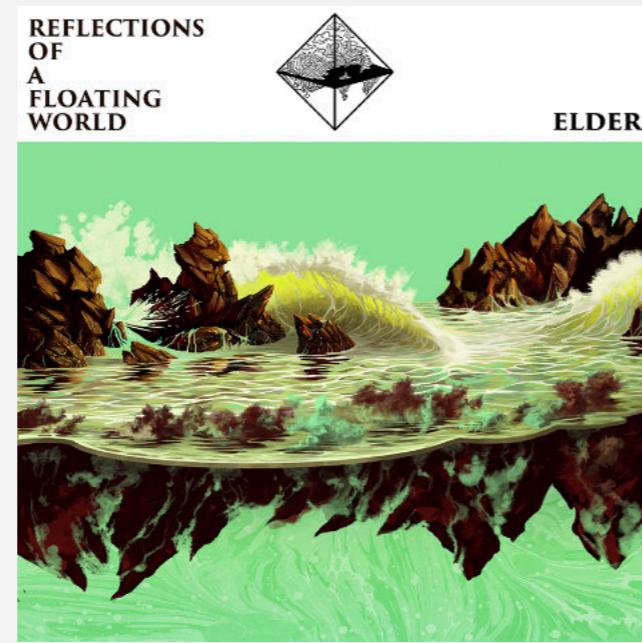
I mean probably the band that's really influenced me the most in that regard is Motorpsycho because they're also a band that's done everything from grunge to pop to progressive rock to psych Rock in their 30 something year career. And when I discovered them just digging through their catalog and listening to a lot of their [music]. They're just a wonderfully creative band. I think maybe in some way I aspire to do the same kind of thing. But that's just to say they're one of like probably hundreds of bands that are having an influence on the way we think about music.

less riffy and a little bit more kind of like floaty and psychedelic. Which also felt like an itch we scratched when making the record that came after it [*Omens*] Innate passage. [*Innate passage*] I think is kind of a marriage

of the Both Worlds. It's got a lot of ethereal floating passages but also kind of return to more like heavy riffing but in a very Progressive style.



Lore (2015)



Reflections Of A Floating World (2017)



Omens (2020)



Innate Passage (2022)

What's your favorite Elder album cover and why?

I'm still partial to *Lore* and *Reflections of a Floating World*. I think these almost comic like landscapes, they fit the records perfectly, and they're very non-narrative. I'm always telling our artists, he comes up with his concepts on his own. Adrian Dexter is his name. He's an old time friend of ours.

He did a lot of different artworks for different bands?

Not so much actually. I mean he's mostly an animator and a filmmaker, so he's very exclusive about whom he works with just because he doesn't want to be like a

commission artist for bands. But we've worked together since we grew up together.

Adrian Dexter, he's the artist. Do you talk with him about your ideas for the album or does he just come up with something?

He's very involved in the creative process from the beginning. I share all the music with him while it's being written and demoed out. So he can already get an idea of the best way to visually represent what we're doing. I'll talk to him about album themes, and we'll bounce ideas off each other kind of. So he's always been a real creative partner for us for [our] aesthetic perspective.

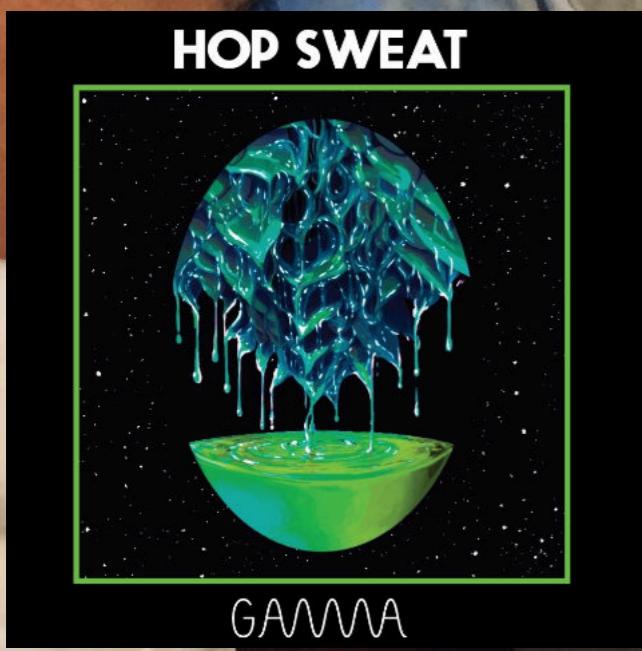
Innate passage is in a rather different art style compared to your previous records. Is there a reason for that?

No I mean for me, I guess it's a bit more abstract than the others. But also *Omens* for me was a lot more narrative and less abstract in some way. To a certain extent most of the artwork has been very much like landscape based, kind of like fantasy worlds, this kind of thing. *Omens* was very much like in your face: Here's a statue of some vaguely Greek or Roman looking figure and for me that was the biggest departure stylistically. I think *Innate Passage* sure it's a bit abstract, but it also kind of immediately picks up this like inner world narrative. So but no, just his style, he [Adrian]

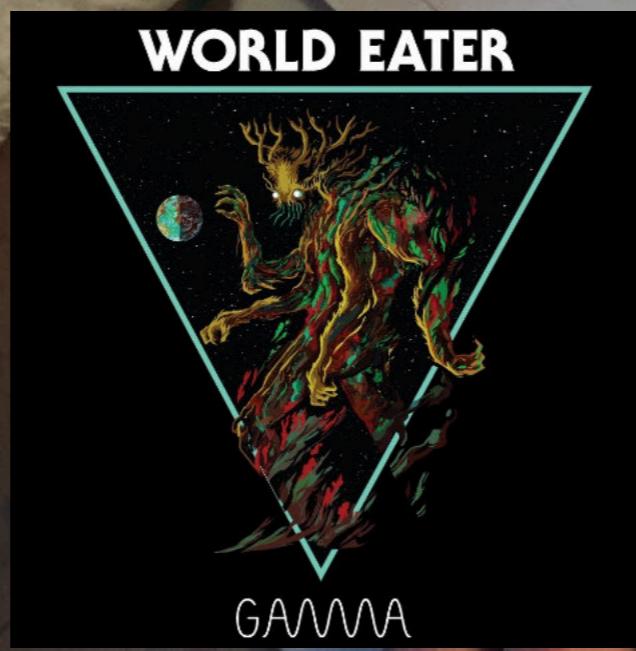
can be extremely detailed. But I think he's like in some period where he's more into like less on the nose and more abstract designs. So part of it has to do with where we're all at creatively at that point in time.

So Adrian did all of the record covers?

Except for two eps which we discussed together. He just didn't have the time, or it was like a special project that was going to be just done differently. But yeah all like the major proper records he's done



Adrian's Design for the Brewery Gamma



GAMMA

Adrian Dexter



Adrian also worked for King Buffalo (2018)

What's your favorite album cover?

God, I don't know. I think I'd really need to peruse my record collection. I don't know of the top of my head. But if we're going to stick with the kind of Elder looking things, I'm a big fan of Roger Dean's artwork, who did a lot of like' 70s Prog Rock stuff and the Yes album covers obviously. Close to the edge is cool actually because it's not like his style usually is [with] these very cool fantasy landscapes with a lot of detail. Close to the edge it's just like a gradient from black to green with the yes logo on top. And I always thought that was such a cool album, too. So I really dig his style. But my favorite album I don't know about that just off the top of my head.



Close To The Edge (1972)



Tales from Topographic Oceans (1973)



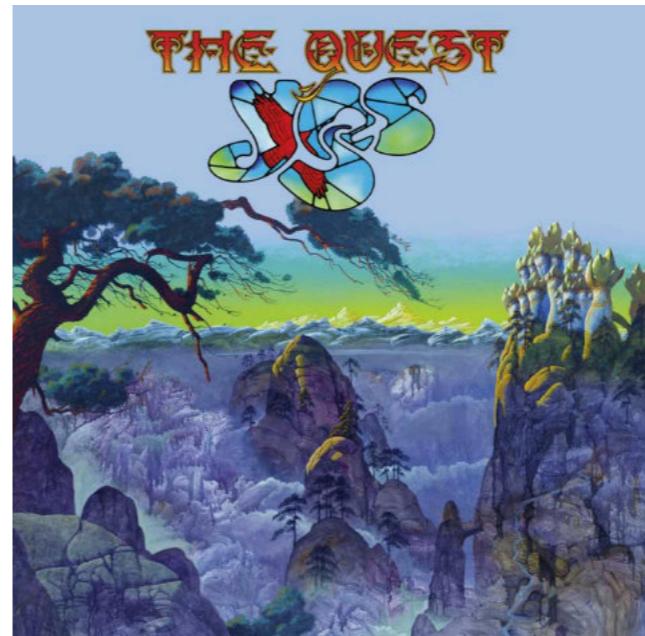
Relayer (1974)



Yesterday (1975, compilation)



The Ladder (1999)



The Quest (2021)



Mirror To The Sky (2023)



Up next for you is a tour with Tool. How did that happen?

Well it's kind of a long story. We meet Danny Carey's wife, Danny being the drummer of the band, a long time ago at this point. Because she and her sister run a small Festival in Portland, Oregon and they invited us to come play a couple of times now. And through that we meet Danny who's also just like a big music fan and super cool guy. They're all just totally passionate about music. He was at the festival and has seen Elder a handful of times since then. The band (Tool) chooses their own support, like each member has their turn to choose the support band, and it became his turn and he just was cool enough to decide to choose us.

That's probably a big opportunity to play for so many people. I wondered what kind of set list will you play because you don't have that much time and all the songs are long?

We don't know just yet to be honest. It's quite a short set list or our playing length is going to be really short. We're used to doing like an hour and a half, we're probably going to do something like a half hour. We've been discussing doing a medley, trying to put some songs together, so we can really just play 30 minutes straight and kind of connect a couple songs. But yeah pretty much all the songs are over 10 minutes, so it's going to be hard to do more than two. And we're going to come up with something creative. I think [we will] put together a couple different set lists and see what works best.

What is an artist you would love to tour with?

I don't know. I had this question like a handful of times and I really don't know. Because we don't generally do support, like

"the songs write themselves to a certain degree"

this thing with Tool is going to be pretty much the first support tour we've ever done, and it's nice to be able to play a full set. Have as much time as you want to do your thing and let it unfold. There's a lot of cool bands I wouldn't mind watching night after night. Spotlights is a band that I've been really listening to a lot lately and kind of thinking about maybe reaching out to them, if they want to do something. We got our buddies weedpecker who are great friends or Papir, they're another Danish band. We're all on the same label. Actually they're one of my favorite bands that I wish would get off their butts and start touring.

When can we expect new music from you guys?

We're hoping 2025. We've been super busy since like Corona happened, and we could tour again and haven't really had a chance to write much new music at all. I think there's like one song that's finished now for the next record. So we're going to take the next year off after the Tool tour and try and make that record. And if we are fast maybe it'll be recorded by the end of the year. But I'm not really worried about rushing anything at this point.

Okay and will you continue your current style of music, or will you try something new?

hard to say. Like I said a little while ago, the songs write themselves to a certain degree and the trend has certainly been in the direction of like less riffy, more Progressive. But the song that's currently finished is also different, maybe simpler, in some ways, plays with some other weird elements that haven't occurred in our music before, drum machine, like some more shoe-gazy sounding stuff. So I hope it sounds different no matter what direction it goes in. that's always the goal.

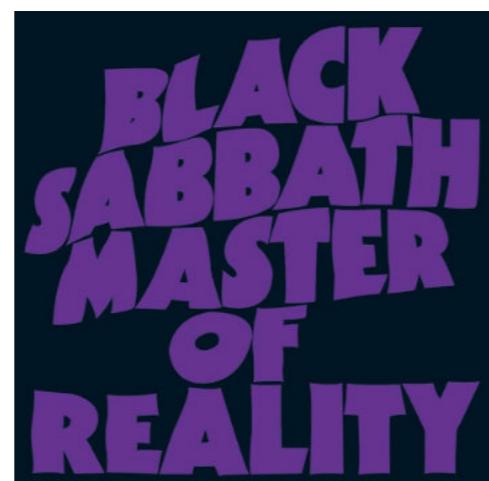


Reine Fiske

(c) Heiko Purnhagen 2013



Svaneborg Kardyb - Over Tage (2022)



Black Sabbath - Master of Reality
(1971)

What's your favorite with Black Sabbath record?

I guess Master of reality is the one I've probably listened to the most and Volume 4 is cool because it's a little less, a little less popular I guess. But also some of the later records are really cool. I also like Dio Sabbath. It's cool. I'm a big Dio fan. But I think I like his solo stuff better than the stuff of Sabbath. So I'll say Master of reality. That's a classic record. Can't go wrong.

And what's your favorite album of the year so far?

What came out this year? ...

There's a really cool Danish duo called Svaneborg Kardyb. It's not metal at all. It's a drummer and a keyboard player. It's instrumental music, like totally beautiful. And they put out a record this year, which is fantastic [note it's actually from 2022]. I don't listen to so much hard music in my off time.

Do you even listen to metal?

Sometimes, not too much.

What's your favorite subgenre of metal?

Growing up, I was really into extreme metal, death, black metal and even embarrassingly to a certain extent power and fantasy metal, before I got into doom and Stoner stuff. So I guess of those genres I could probably listen to like death or black metal most easily nowadays. I've been on like a weird Bolt Thrower kick lately. And oh yeah I saw your Death shirt earlier. Death are f__g awesome!

But I don't listen to too much metal. It's usually when I'm in a weird mood.

And who's a musician that you really enjoy and that inspired you?

I love the guitar playing of Reine Fiske who's probably best known for playing in the Swedish band Dungen. He also played with Motorpsycho for some years. We don't play at all similar. But he's like a wonderfully creative, just abstract guitarist who's got like very unique tone and a unique playing style. He just makes really cool lead ideas that are super beautiful. He's not a show player, you know, he's not flashy, he just stands in the back and does his thing and just kicks ass

Thank you Nick!



Elder's second guitarist Mike Risberg



Elder's Bassplayer Jack Donovan





Thanks Elder

Photo Credits:

Adrian Dexter: <https://w3q4u7z4.rocketcdn.me/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/terra-incognita-david-kamp-animation-workshop-animation-sound-davidkamp-studiokamp-foley-ikki-films-keepbig4.jpg>

<https://en.unifrance.org/directories/person/459119/adrian-dexter>

Reine Fiske: https://images.equipboard.com/uploads/source/image/15933/dsc_6346.jpg

THANKS FOR READING!

Hope you liked the two last interviews from 2023. On two new stuff. One thing I realized talking with musicians about so many album covers, why not ask the artist themselves? So doing that will be a goal for the future. There

are already plenty of names in my mind. I am excited for more shows and material in the new year. Until the next issue

STAY BRUTOOL!