

Sunn O)))

Darkness

Formed in 1998 by Greg Anderson and Stephen O'Malley, Sunn O))) (pronounced "Sun") is arguably the most iconic band in the drone metal universe. Cloaked in hooded robes and shrouded in fog, their performances are equal parts concert and ritual. Their name is a tribute to the amplifier brand Sunn, hinting at their deep love for gear and volume.

Albums like *Monoliths & Dimensions* and *Black One* exemplify their approach: sub-bass frequencies, minimal percussion, and otherworldly guest vocalists (including Attila Csihar of Mayhem). Their collaborations span avant-garde jazz musicians, throat singers, and even classical ensembles, constantly pushing sonic boundaries.

"ENCASED IN MARBLE AND HONEY FROM THE SWARM"

Sunn O))) once played a show inside a cathedral, maximizing natural reverb. They also released a track featuring Julian Cope delivering an incantation-like poem over waves of distortion. In a conversation with *The Creative Independent*, Stephen O'Malley—guitarist and co-founder of Sunn O)))—reflects on the band's deep commitment to sonic exploration. Far from the clichés of minimalism often associated with drone music, O'Malley describes a process rooted in density,

intention, and sonic detail. Below is an excerpt from that interview, offering rare insight into the philosophy that drives Sunn O)))'s monumental sound:

"People tend to view drone as minimal. I'm curious about having an artistic practice that, from the outside, may seem specific—but you've managed to find new ways to investigate this approach for two decades."

Stephen O'Malley: "The term 'minimal' is misleading. There was a moment where I was interested in minimalist music and artwork and things like that and tried to understand what that meant, but musically I never really used that word so much. I mean, it's an easy way to tag it as, 'Okay, there's absence of a lot of things that a lot of music has or that you might expect from music,' but we're really focusing on so many details of sound."

"Maximalist."

Stephen O'Malley: "Very metal word. It could definitely apply to Sunn O)))—there's so much excess in what we're doing, but I don't know... For me, it's more about intonation. I mean intonation in the way of discovering all of these elements in sound and the work we do with sound and focusing on those. Then, by focusing on those, all of these other elements reveal themselves, or the awareness opens up from my point of view, you know? It leads to a lot of different things. It certainly doesn't seem formally minimal at all."

Boris

Shapeshifting

Notorious for defying categorization, Boris was formed in Japan in 1992. Though they're often associated with drone metal, Boris' discography veers from noise rock to shoegaze to hardcore punk. Albums like *Amplifier Worship* and *Floodare* drone staples, while *Pink* brought them broader acclaim with a more rock-oriented edge.

What sets Boris apart is their ability to *blend beauty with brutality*. Guitarist Wata's melodic leads can drift over crushing distortion, while Atsuo's drums either thunder or disappear entirely. Their album art, track names, and limited pressings add to their cult mystique. Boris sometimes releases multiple albums per year, often with radically different sounds. They've also collaborated extensively with Merzbow, the noise icon, creating impenetrable sonic landscapes that challenge even the most seasoned listeners.

In the following excerpt from a 2024 interview with *JRock News*, Boris drummer and vocalist Atsuo reflects on the band's collaboration with Kiyoharu and the deeper legacy of Japanese rock. His responses reveal not only the shared aesthetic values that unite seemingly different artists, but also Boris's belief in the transformative power of sound.

Though Boris and Kiyoharu are both well-established figures in Japanese rock, each with your own history and legacy, your signature sounds are arguably quite different. Why did you decide to collaborate on this tour?



Atsuo: "I met [Kiyoharu] at a live performance in 2017, which was an acoustic set featuring MORRIE from Dead End and Baki from Gastunk. Actually, the place where we met symbolizes everything. Gastunk and Dead End are very important bands in the history of Japanese rock, and following that history, there's Kiyoharu as a solo artist and with Kuroyume, and Boris is also at the forefront of that context. Since we met, we've been looking for opportunities to perform together, and this Australian tour finally made it happen. I think our music styles might sound different on the surface, but the aesthetic and values that we're rooted in are connected at the core. I believe this tour was inevitable."

How does Boris promote Japan's rock history and culture in a way no other band can?

Atsuo: "There is a dangerous history of rock that can change people's consciousness and way of life, and our music is part of that lineage. Whether it's music or anything else, knowing the context of a work can make it more deeply enjoyable. Our continuing activities themselves prove the existence of this history, and it would be great if they serve as an opportunity for people to learn about it. Crossing the sea and resonating sounds with Kiyoharu on the same stage, great music can itself become criticism and education and carry various meanings."