

Attached you can find the interview between our editor Sascha and Niko Kohlemainen from Lord Fist before translating to German.

Thank you very much for taking some time to answer a few questions for our magazine.

First of all: Congratulations to the new album, I really enjoyed it a lot!

Thank you very much! It was such a long time between Wilderness of Hearts and our debut, that most people basically believed that we had split-up. If we had some momentum going years ago, all of that was gone by now, haha. Knowing that, the only thing that really mattered to us was that we didn't want to let our very few die-hard fans down. We know that there were people who really enjoyed our debut Green Eyleen and with the new album we just went further our own way with that approach. Now that the record is finally out, it warms our heart to hear that the record was worth waiting five years.

I'd be really interested in how you guys worked on the album. Could you let us know how long it took you to get all the songwriting done and where you recorded and produced it?

It was really shattered. We started working on the new songs right after the release of our first album but soon there were many distractions: members having long distance between them, living around Finland, other band projects and life situations swallowing more time etc. Fortunately this band suffered for all of this and it took maybe two years to get it going again when Perttu made a motion for it and had also new material to show us. When we made the decision to start working on the second album, the few times we got to rehearse together, we were just working on the songs and booking the drum recordings at the end of August 2018 forced us to get the arrangements to a certain point.

After the successful weekend with drums, we spent probably four weekends recording the rest of the instruments and the vocals and this was between October 2018 and April 2019, so a period of 6 months in total. Compared to earlier releases quite a bit of guitar and vocal parts were composed, arranged and improvised when recording. It was both rewarding and nerve-cracking, but a new valuable experience. All the recording was done at one rehearsal place in Lappeenranta. Our friend Samuli (Wandering Midget, Outlaw, Anvil Strykez etc.) handled the recording and mixing, the same as with our debut album but this time it was another place. But yeah, not a professional studio but a very humble setting. It just takes some eligible tools and someone who knows what he is doing.

I am always curious about how the creative process in different bands works. How do you handle creativity in the band; does everyone have a specific role, for instance some dedicated songwriters and one lyricist? Or is it a band effort and everyone is taking part in everything?

Me (Niko, guitar) and Perttu (guitar, vocals) do most of the song-writing, but we always arrange as a band. Usually either one of us has a song idea (2-3 riffs, maybe some vocal ideas), we present the idea for the rest of the band and if everyone likes the ideas, we

proceed to transform it into a final song, all four of us at the rehearsal space. Usually we figure out the main riff/theme, the verse, maybe a chorus together very fast and get stuck with the interludes or whatever they call them, transitions? C-sections? Probably not that, haha. But in those parts our songs are usually the most high-flying, adventurous and inventive so we like to ripen them even if it needs time.

Some of that stuff just comes out of nowhere when we are jamming an unfinished song, someone just starts to play something that catches everyone else's attention, the other members respond to that and magic happens. On the new album, such moments can be found in *Flying Over Tiprinith*, *Sisters*, *Tigers of Snow*, *Arkona Cross II*, *Aurorae* etc. Sometimes it takes months or years for these parts to find their place and we'll just wait!

In your press info I read that you write about real events but merged those with dreamy visions. When I look at titles like *Flying over Tiprinith* or *Arkona Cross II* they instantly evoke this special fantasy vibe. Could you please tell us more about the meaning behind the lyrics on *Wilderness of Hearts* and how they are connected to real life yet still transcend into something beyond?

Perttu wrote all the lyrics, but of course I can say something about them. The album title came with the observation that the nature, the forest or THE wilderness - if you will - is populated by thousands of different looking creatures, but inside them, they have their hearts which are physically, in shape and in appearance actually very alike. It's about having so much in common with other living things, especially in those moments when you feel estranged from say, other people. Our first album *Green Eyleen* dealt with the relationship between the earth and the human race, but on *Wilderness of Hearts* we focus more on the relationship of nature and single individual. That is a much more intimate and emotional viewpoint, you can feel it listening to the record.

Your band photos really brought a smile to the faces of everyone here at the magazine, and I like that you seem to have this nerdy kind of humor. Do you think the Metal scene in general needs some relief from all those „evil looking“ deadly serious people on band photos, or is it just that you are being yourself without any special intention?

Haha, we are glad that you've had such a strong reaction with them. In the past we've done promo shoots with serious, cool, epic, professional and whatever different approach and some have turned out great, some not so great. This time we wanted to do something different again and we just had this one idea: let's get a horse. That'll be a new experience and probably result in something conspicuous - in a good or a bad way.

Apart from the horse we didn't plan anything or didn't force anyone to do anything. We booked the horse and drove 20 minutes to the place where it was living. Everyone wore the clothes they wanted, our singer Perttu brought his sword I've frowned upon for years, and on previous occasions I've prohibited him from using it, but this time - like I said - everyone did whatever they wanted. You want to take your shirt off? Be my guest... He climbed on the horse, we gave our friend Jussi (from *Sonic Poison*, *Warp Transmission* etc.) Perttu's semi okay camera and he took the pictures with a total of zero craftsmanship with the device, he

even unintentionally used some stupid setting which prevented the files to be well edited after, haha.

The end result is near perfect. It is all left to viewer's interpretation to see and feel whatever they want. Awkwardness, confusion, exoticism, strength, wisdom, confidence...

Then you hear the music and it adds another layer to that experience of what this group is about. Reminds me of the legendary death metal band Impetigo's promos which look very extempore: some of the members have a very metal look and evil face expressions, but some look like taxi drivers or jocks?! Let the music speak for itself, legendary.

I think that bands can do whatever they want, but healthy and self-assured self-irony has always been present in heavy metal, admit it or not. But having some of that doesn't mean that you are not serious.

Bonus question: would you consider yourselves as a nerdy band, I mean, anyone of you guys into pen&paper RPGs, computer games, Fantasy, LARPing or stuff like that?

Sorry to disappoint you but our nerdyness doesn't quite reach that level, haha. We have many friends that do all of that, but in this band members don't go further than playing computer games. On a bigger scale I consider myself a somewhat of a nerd, because for years I have gone very far with my interests in music, movies, literature and the lives of the people making them. At some point I stopped playing video games, because looking at my friends spending all their time with them and getting nothing else done just evoked despise in me, haha. I thought that I'd spend my precious time better with 'higher' forms of art, but of course it isn't all black and white. Some of the most artistic visionaries of our time are in game-making and there is also lots of high art and invention to be found. So I'm playing games again, but pretty much sticking with the classics (they are also cheap because you can just loan them from friends!). This year I went through the Metal Gear Solid 1-4 for the first time in my life and it was up there with the greatest art/entertainment experiences of my life.

But back to the musical style: your music is directly influenced by the sound of the NWoBHM. What do you love so much about that era and its music in general, and which bands are your major influences?

When me and Perttu found heavy metal in our teens, Iron Maiden was of course one of those first bands that you start and grow up with. But when you're young it is also natural to develop the taste looking for more extreme and extreme... thrash, death/thrash, death metal, black metal and so forth. But after we went through that and everybody had gained some skill and experience in playing in bands, we found the unsung history of traditional heavy metal: Manilla Road, Pagan Altar, Crimson Glory, Gotham City, Heavy Load, Virtue... the list goes on and on. After a long time, "traditional" heavy metal just sounded so powerful and expressive. It seemed like only the sky is the limit for songwriting and musicianship in this genre, but still most bands don't choose to utilize a slightest bit of the potential. We wanted to unlock some of that potential!

You are not unknown in Finland's underground metal scene, how would you describe the scene to somebody who is not from Finland?

A small amount of very active people. Most of the musicians play in many bands and different styles of metal, such is the case with the members of this band also. The same is with the fans, most follow many styles and go to see many kinds of bands. Some people going to underground metal and punk shows is very common.

It's only the separation of the underground and more mainstream or "modern" metal that is very prominent. Like most of the metal people have listened to Pantera at some point in their teens, but if you wear a Pantera shirt at an underground show here, people will automatically take you as a mainstream guy or a tourist at a wrong show, haha. The metal brotherhood or unity doesn't get us very far.... It's become a recurring joke that your Mom goes "Do you know Tarja's son Mikko, he also likes metal, you'd probably have plenty to talk about!" Yeah, right Mom... Of course from time to time, some underground bands get some mainstream exposure and get more of a following, but the real underground scene is quite elitist and exclusive. Metal has made me a person that I am and I've given a huge part of my life to it. But nowadays I've so many other interests in life, that scene/inner circle/jerking each other off-thing just seems pathetic in smaller cities there is close-to-none chance to practice that because there are so few people.

The corona crisis hit the music scene very hard this year, with all festivals and gigs being cancelled. How were your experiences this year, and how is the situation in Finland?

The spring was a lot staying home and not seeing much people, but it suited me then because I had gathered a bit too much stress with everything at that time. So being home, reading books, watching tv-series and cooking with my girlfriend was fine for a few months. The summer came fast and appeared almost normal, of course no festivals or big shows, but still managed to see some friends and do summer stuff, even played a few gigs with other bands. Now the situation is getting worse again and the restrictions are getting more strict but we'll see if it hits the climax at Christmas and gets better after that or what.

So absolutely no sense in booking many shows now, but hopefully we'll turn that to victory and get to work on new songs so there won't be that long of a wait with our third album. We have a lot of material already composed for it.

Although nobody really knows what 2021 will bring, do you have any shows planned in the near future?

We had two "record release shows" booked in December/January, but with the situation now getting worse again, we'll see if either one of those will happen.

You released your new album on CD and vinyl, and it can be streamed via Bandcamp. Your debut is also up on streaming services such as Spotify or Apple Music. Will Wilderness of Hearts also be available there soon? And what do you think about streaming in general in contrast to releasing music on a physical medium?

Yes, the album is now up on Spotify after a small delay. There's a time and place for every format. Personally I consume lots of music on streaming services, especially new music.

As a teenager I spent all my money on CDs, nowadays I try to buy the important records on vinyl, but I can't say that I am a record collector of any sort. The cassette has fast become a go-to-format for new bands and because I'm often playing and seeing shows the cassettes are easy to grab directly from the bands. Record stores I visit rarely because there isn't many, in my hometown there is not one record store. Only a few antique stores and thrift shops those have some records.

Last but not least: I always love to hear what other metalheads' favorite albums are. Would you be so nice and let us know your top three albums of all time?

Only three... that is sadism, but I'll play by the rules!

Repulsion - Horrified

If there's ever discussion about best albums, Horrified is always one of the first that comes to mind. When you talk about the best albums, I think they must be consistent and in extreme music you rarely find something as consistent as this album. Horrified has everything: riffs, the best-sounding blastbeat, good dynamics and enough variation between fast and groovy songs. Two of my other bands (Scumripper and Sonic Poison) are greatly influenced by this record although technically their approach is very different from each other.

Sigh - IV: Dread Dreams

Sigh is one of the most inventive and original metal bands ever, period. They never do the same album twice, but keep on exploring new music styles and still remain loyal to their metal roots. Probably the only existing band whose new record I just can't wait. First time listening to their new album is always the most exciting and emotional adventure. I love all of their albums, but IV: Dread Dreams is probably my favourite and ridiculously overlooked. Many people know this band, at least the first two albums and possibly Imaginary Sonicscape, but it's very rare to meet someone who has ever listened to their 3rd and 4th album. Totally irrational...

Leatherface - Mush

After the age of 20 it has been rare for me to find a band so good that it totally blows my mind and gets me obsessed, but Leatherface is one of those. Perfect melodic, melancholic and emotional punk rock with unique voice and unbeatable songwriting. Insane use of two guitars and how they construct layers and harmony. And again, what a consistent album, just hit after hit. The album opener is actually the weakest track, skip it if listening for the first time! Sigh is underrated but after all they are avant-garde black metal... this band should've been huge but it even took me years to find it!

Thank you very much for answering my questions!

Thanks for the interview and review!