Dungeons of Darkness

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Welcome

This is the first edition of Dungeons of Darkness, a magazine dedicated to covering the latest news from the dungeon synth community, and related genres. This includes (but not limited to) dark ambient, Neo-Classical, and Medieval/Renaissance music.

We will tend to feature these on a regular basis, plus any extra surprises we feel like throwing in that month;

**album reviews*

**artist/band interviews*

**news about new or upcoming releases*

**news about significant events taking place in the community*

**general articles about making music*

If you wish to order a physical copy of the album, you may contact the editor, Levi Talvi, here : Gynophagiaband@hotmail.com

Simply send in an email requesting a hard copy, we will reply with prices, shipping costs, and other such details.

We hope you enjoy this and subsequent issues of Dungeons of Darkness.

Let the adventure begin!

-Levi Talvi

What is dungeon synth?

This is a question I often get asked as a dungeon synth artist and as a fan. It's a hard question to answer. I can give you a formulaic, bullet-point breakdown of the key musical features all dungeon synth has, or I could go on a long diatribe which would make you question my sanity. None of these options give you a good picture of what the genre is, so I'll simply try to find a happy medium.

Dungeon synth is a musical journey. It is realms, it is foreign kingdoms. It is the melodies carried on ancient winds through faraway lands, the notes that cry out from ancient bell towers. Drawing on elements of the human soul buried in time, dungeon synth aims to remove the listener from their humdrum life and draw them into a rich soundscape of fantasy and escapism.

Mainly, this effect is achieved through rich layered keyboard textures (often using MIDI sounds) and minimalist compositions. Some artists lull the reader into a trance-like state through abstract repetition and atmosphere. Others still try to bring the reader with them on a journey down a musical path that twists and turns, constantly exploring new territory in this mystical soundscape.

The journey itself is designed to take you into a fantasy land, with orcs and wizards and magic. Sometimes it takes us to the darker places, to the moans of ghosts from bygone wars, to the summoning of infernal demons hell-bent on spreading death wherever they go, to the necromancer torturing innocents to death to learn more about the black arts.

But there are also illuminated moments. Spots in the sun, moments when our journey brings us upon a happy village scene, where elves dance in the moonlight, or where humans feast to mark the solstice, with meat and mead for all!

The stories of these fantastic lands and intriguing peoples are rarely told through words, and when these words are spoken they are merely incantations of a spell designed to transcend our physical existence. Rather, the melodies and atmosphere created are what draws the listener into these new worlds.

Dungeon synth is often best listened to in meditations, while one ponders upon their ancestral history, upon a magic now lost in the world, upon values and customs no longer practised. In a dark setting, in isolation with only the moon for company, can the full force of this new genre be felt.

The genre emerged from early dark ambient acts, such as Burzum and Mortiis. These first synthesizer albums such as "Daudi Baldrs" and "Født til å Herske" layed the blueprints for what would later become the genre of dungeon synth ; repetitive neoclassical compositions with intricately layered synths and, perhaps most importantly, a Tolkienesque sense of sword-and-sorcery escapism.

But what of the future of this new musical phenomenon?

The future, belongs to you and me, my friends.

And Dungeons of Darkness cordially invites you to help make it with us.

-Levi Talvi

Interview with Drøm

Dungeons of Darkness interview the main composer and keyboardist of the brilliant French ambient black metal band, "Drom", Alex Lamia.

DROM

Interview on next page ;

Interview with Drøm, part 1

Levi:

Hello.

Could you start by telling us a little bit about yourself, your musical history, and the history of your band?

Alex :

Sure. My name is Alexandre Lamia, and I play many instruments since about 12 years (drums for the beginning, guitar, bass and keyboards). My musical history is mainly based in metal music. I was converted by my parents, and I listen a lot of metal styles like black metal, death metal, symphonic metal, or thrash metal for exemple. But the particularity is that I love movies soundtracks and video games music. And I try to combine metal music and movies soundtracks in one project, my project called "Drøm", like Nightwish made for their latest album, Imaginaerum. But Drøm is essentially based in ambiant music with a big epic influence from movies and video games. The project started 2 years ago with another name, "Post Mortem Project", then the name "Drøm" appeared.

I work with two guys, Matthieu Martin for few compositions and Abel Haddad, the Drøm singer. I released a first EP called "Hidden Sophia" in June 2013.

Levi:

Would you consider them full members of the band or just session musicians?

Alex :

I think Abel and Martin are a part of the band and no session musician because they have an impact for my compositions. When we will make gigs (in summer 2014 I expect), I will find session musicians.

Levi :

Very interesting.

When you do a live show, how do you plan to accomplish the layered keyboard effects I have heard on your EP? Will you use backing tracks and play only one part live like Nightwish do, or will you have some other arrangement?

And which instrument will you play on stage?

Alex :

At the moment when I speak to you, I don't know how to process this effects. I know that it will be a keyboardist for shows, but also I know that he can't play all the keyboards parts, because there are many many keyboards parts for Drøm tracks. So maybe, we can add backing tracks for shows, or add another sessions musicians. I really don't know today. We will see it later, but I would want to add a harpist and violonist for shows, it would be great. On stage, I will play guitar, but maybe, keyboards. Again, I don't know today because the gigs will not arrive now.

Levi :

Fair enough.

Two more live show questions and then we'll track back to the EP.

How soon do you intend to start gigging/touring and where would you like to go?

Alex :

No problem. I intend to start gigging in my country, France, and especially in Paris and Nice. Because I know a lot of stage and people in my city and Paris (because I don't play only in Drøm, but with 3 others bands). For the beginning, it would be great to do shows in those two cities, and others french cities. If Drøm arrive to do enough shows in France, I would like to do gigs in European countries or other if I have the occasion, seize every opportunity to do gigs because I love to be on stage.

Levi :

That's a brilliant attitude to have, I hope I can get my hands on some video of a live Drøm performance when you start doing them.

Now, about the EP. I noticed the name of the project, and many of the song titles are in Danish/Norwegian. Was there any particular reason for that? How did you learn those languages?

Alex :

Thank you, I will not forget you so haha ! Yeah, I wanted to name few Drøm tracks mostly in Norwegian, because most of my influences to do Drøm are Norwegian and Finnish. It's like a tribute, and a mark of respect for Drøm musical influences. But also, I wanted to do some ... strange language mixing. As you can see for example, "Hidden Sophia" is a mixing of the english word "Hidden" and the greek (or latin) name "Sophia", which means the knowledge. In the next records, I'll do the same thing for track names, because I want to make Drøm as a kind of big language tribute. Also, I learned all those languages by internet because I didn't have the occasion to learn these languages in school or whatever.

Levi :

Ah, lovely. I assumed Sophia was a name of a person.

It's wonderful that you're so multi-lingual, but perhaps I just find it surprising because Britons aren't very well-versed in foreign languages.

You mentioned that you gave your songs Norwegian names as a tribute to some of the influences of Drøm. Could you go into that a little?

Interview with *Drøm*, part 2

Alex :

Yeah, a lot of persons believe that, It's the trap haha ! Yeah, French black metal bands named their bands, tracks and lyrics in French. It's also a tribute to the french language I think. But it's just not how I want to lead Drøm. I have many influences to do Drøm. I think the bands that influenced me the most are Ulver, Burzum, Opeth, Summoning, Nightwish and a little bit of Two Steps From Hell for the epic side of Drøm. The 4 bands that I mentioned are Swedish, Finnish or Norwegian. It's the main reason. The other reason that I gave my songs Norwegian names is that I admire Nordic and ancients languages. For the next records, I will add Nordic lyrics I think.

Levi :

What gear and music recording software do you and your bandmates use?

Alex :

For Drøm tracks, I use a keyboard Yamaha YPT-330 (PSR-E333) for taking the main idea of a melody or a new track. I take the idea with simply the vocal recorder of my phone, just because when I have inspiration and idea, It's hard for me to keep them in my head, like all the artists I think. So I wanted to find a recording system simply and fast to take ideas I find. After, I compose all the tracks in Guitar Pro 5, a software just amazing for me and that I use since many many years. (For the story, the song Hidden Sophia contains more than 12 differents tracks and about 70 score pages). After the GP composition, I shift the song with Fruity Loops 10 Producer Edition, and it's the hardest part for a song, because I work a lot with the ambiance and I except a particular sound for each of them. So I work with equalizer, reverb, mixing etc .. For "Hidden Sophia" EP, I didn't add natural sounds and effects sounds. But from "Beyond" album, I will add many externals ambiances like a forest, or whatever !

Levi :

Fascinating! What do you hope to accomplish with the band in the next few years?

And, last question, where can our readers find your music, and do you have anything you want to say to them?

Alex :

Sure dude !
I hope the best for Drøm. The very best. This project is what I except for those 2 years and before. For the future of Drøm, I'm in a period of composition for the next EP called "Etter Livet" with Matthieu and Abel, and predominately, the first Drøm album called "Beyond". After those records, I will try to find the rest of session musicians to rehearse and do gigs.

Dungeon Synth readers can find the first EP "Hidden Sophia" here :

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pdYVktsmI_w

Here it's the preview of few tracks of Beyond record :

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=abxpUCMnEso

The Drøm facebook page :

https://www.facebook.com/PostMortemProject

If I have anything I want to say to them .. Mmmmh .. Listen the music you want, don't be afraid of critics, in your musical bands you prefer, or your life in general. Live your life and don't survive. It's a sentence that I love to say, mainly dedicated for the metal community and for people in general. Thank you all for your support !

Listen to their EP, "Hidden Sophia"!

Recording At Home

1 – Setting Up the Apparatus

The majority of dungeon synth artists (probably the vast majority) are one-man acts that record all their music on their own, in the comfort of their own homes.

In some ways, I may be preaching to the converted here. There's plenty of amazing artists out there (and we hope to cover/interview as many as we can!) and one could very easily imagine that all the people who care enough about music, and want to do it badly enough, have already done the things I am going to detail in this article on their own.

If you are one of these people, this does not apply to you, though you may still enjoy the read…

Right now I am trying to evangelize to those people who are making excuses, who think they can't do it. Dungeon synth, thankfully, doesn't have as many of the typical excuses to hand that a lot of failed or just lazy musicians use in other genres. No-one can say that the reason they didn't get anywhere or didn't make anything was because they didn't get on a label, because they weren't photogenic enough, because they couldn't find other bandmates, because very few of these factors affect dungeon synth artists.

So, you sitting at home reading this. Have you ever wanted to write symphonies? Do you ever get ideas rattling around in your head? Have you ever wanted to learn to play an instrument?

All of these things, and I repeat, ALL of them are within your reach.

Unless you have no income whatsoever, you can quite feasibly create your home studio, write, record and release an album, all alone.

And this is hopefully going to be a little guide to help you to do it.

The bare minimum kit you need to produce dungeon synth (and their average prices) ;

- *A computer (with hardware roughly good enough to run Morrowind) [£200-£600]*
- *A keyboard with MIDI capacity [£40-£200]*
- *A MIDI-to-USB lead [£1-£10]*
- *Music recording software [Prices vary, but the cheapest are usually about £50]*
- *A microphone (optional) [£1-£50]*

And that's it. Seriously.

Now, in fairness, that is still quite expensive. According to this guide you need to have at least £395 at your disposal before you can start recording dungeon synth. However, the most expensive item, the computer, you probably already own. So, if we remove that it costs you less than £200 to immediately set up your studio.

Once you've got this set up, you can very easily start recording. It's NOT impossible, and you don't need the best gear.

Especially not for dungeon synth.

Watch out for next month's edition, where I'll continue this essay series with "Recording at Home 2 – Learning to Play/Write".

In that time, perhaps those of you with the desire to create music the same as we do, could set up their studio (which, by the way, you can then use for the rest of your life, for free). I hope this has helped you in some way!

-Levi Talvi

Review of "Sôl Austan, Mâni Vestan"

On May 27th, 2013, Varg Vikernes of the now purely ambient project Burzum, released his 11th album and 3d ambient album, Sôl Austan, Mâni Vestan. Shortly after this album he announced the end of Burzum as a metal act (which I found a bit upsetting, though I'm still a massive fan of Burzum's work and I do enjoy this album).

I'm going to go through this album song-by-song and analyse it, though I feel I would be doing the album a great disservice if I didn't talk about the greater context behind it. That context is, of course, the nefarious "Forebearers" film, which this album appears on as a soundtrack in an unmastered form. I have seen the trailer of this film, and it has left me sickened with no desire to see the full version. To put it in blunt terms, this film is a desperate attempt to romanticize our notions of race and European culture. The vast majority of Marie Cachet's theory is utter horseshit, and I'll be honest. I won't go into the details of it, because while I am passionate about the issue I have trepidations about embarking on an anthropological rant in the middle of a dungeon synth magazine.

Nevertheless, I will say this in rebuttal of her claims ; her idea is not exactly new. Anthropologists have wondered for years about the relationship between humans and Neanderthals, and extensive studies have been done on both of our genomes to determine any correlation. The most generous studies I have ever seen (even those done by people who SUPPORT the idea that we interbred with Neanderthals) say that we have, at most, about 5% Neanderthal DNA in us (out of the DNA specific to each of these species), totally blowing Marie Cachet's claim that we have over 90% Neanderthal ancestry (if you're "pureblood" European, of course) completely out of the water.

In order to try and judge this album fairly I will try and ignore the racist implications of the movie.

Still, the fact that it is made as a soundtrack for a movie does affect "Sôl Austan, Mâni Vestan" in a significant way. When I first listened to this I felt underwhelmed – almost cheated! The album at first failed to captivate my attention, failed to keep me listening with intent. I found my mind wandering, my body fidgeting. Although the album did create a brilliant atmosphere at times that I could escape into, as a first impression I wasn't so impressed.

And that's because I expected this album to be the third in a trilogy of ambient albums which he intended to start with "Daudi Baldrs". When I got "Sôl Austan, Mâni Vestan" for the first time, I listened to "Daudi Baldrs" and "Hlidskjálf" in full before I heard the new album. The obvious striking difference between these works became apparent immediately – "Daudi Baldrs" and "Hlidskjálf" were driven by very powerful melodies which stuck in the listeners head through constant repetition.

"Sôl Austan, Mâni Vestan" had significantly less of this repetition, it was more through-composed than the others (though there was musical structure to a lot of the songs on this album. The melodies on many of the songs weren't as percussive or as strong and were designed to take the background, not the foreground like they did in his previous ambient works.

Prior to the release of the album, people said it would sound like a return to ambient music from older albums, like "Channelling The Power of Souls Into A New God" or "Han Som Reiste", and I was quite excited about this, as I loved the synthesizer tracks that featured on old Burzum albums (I even did a cover album of all my favourite ones!).

However, I found this judgement to be somewhat wrong. These songs weren't as focused or as driven as previous efforts, and they sounded significantly more real. This more "real", more vivid sound is brought on by the fact that Varg uses a lot of "real" instruments as well as keyboard tracks to record this album. It is unclear whether or not the keyboard tracks were MIDI or not, but one thing we know for sure is that the drums, bass and guitars he used (making full use of the apparatus he used to record metal albums for Burzum) are very much real. I'm not sure how I feel about these on some of the songs. Certainly, acoustic guitars create a brilliant sense of mood, and Lord Lovidicus in particular has shown that they can be used brilliantly in dungeon synth and ambient music in general. However, the bass, when it isn't totally inaudible or blended in to create gentle harmonies with the keyboard sounds, seem unsure if it's coming or going. I felt, at times, that it might not have been totally necessary and perhaps could have been better replaced with a double bass.

The song-by-song analysis starts on the next page!

01. Sǫl austan (East of the Sun)

The synth sounds at the start of this album are fascinating, if a bit slow. I like how it starts off with a very low note, with diminished string sounds accompanied by a synthetic bell-like sound with slow decay. Immediately afterwards, you notice the bass drum coming in like heartbeat, giving one the feeling of taking steps towards a new place, east of the sun. The lighter strings continue, with single notes sustained for a long time, until a buzzing, distorted synth sound comes on, very reminiscent of the synth sounds Vikernes used on "Filosofem". With the slow-moving bell melody, the song "Rundgang Um Die Transzedentale Saule Der Singularitat" in particular comes to mind. This triumphant synth line, upon its arrival, gives the feeling of having stepped over a hill, and beholding a beautiful valley stretched out before you.

There is also a weird kind of gargling sound in the background, in a very low register. I am not quite sure what to make of it. I will say that at times it adds atmosphere, and it doesn't cause very much obstruction behind the synth strings and bell.

Through all these layered strings, about halfway through the song an acoustic guitar comes in, playing a very simple melody in triplets that seems to go up or down depending on the chords being marked out by the strings.

Suddenly, it is all brought to a dramatic halt. The song goes silent, save for what appears to be a dulcimer playing single notes that are held until they die, then played again.

After this slight pause, the song returns to its former grandeur, repeating the chorus that began with the entry of the guitar, although the guitar is drowned out a bit by the heavy strings.

The finale of the piece is marked by solemn bells. Sometimes they play just single notes, sometimes they are in harmonic pairs. The piece drifts into its meditative end with the last bell fading into nothingness.

02. Rынar munt юы finna (You Shall Find Secrets)

In sharp contrast to the ending of "Sǫl austan", this song starts of rather percussively with a sound that Vikernes said was achieved with a hammer. And that is exactly the image I get from listening to this song ; I imagine dwarves (perhaps those banished by Odin?) hammering away at a forge to uncover the secrets of iron and steel.

This piece is very rhythmic, with the hammer and bass drum dominating for most of it. However, there are more tranquil moments where an acoustic guitar with a deep echo effect shows a more melodic character.

The synth sound weaves itself in somewhere in this song, between the fleeting guitar lines and the steady beating of the hammer and drums. Indeed, this piece appears to be marked by periods of pure percussion and periods where there is melody also. Again, this is certainly very reminiscent of dwarves working at a forge (for me, anyway). The synth sound is very dreamy and at the end it is given a little solo (though not a very technical one) that puts the listener in a very dream-like state, forecasting the mood for the next piece.

03. Sǫlarrвs (Sun-Journey)

This is one of my favourite pieces from the album. From the start it is very solemn and meditative, yet also with a distinguished melody. Despite its sincere mood, this piece is still very happy, reflecting the brightness that the title might suggest.

A bouncing synth ties in with a crisp guitar sound, with a lot of reverb, to define the chorus the first time we hear it. Like Dolch, Burzum seems to have finally mastered the skill of showing and not telling in music. The most beautiful notes of the melody are avoided for a long time, hinted at through harmonies or simply empty spaces as the guitar, bells and synth intertwine with each other in a beautiful dance.

In this piece, Vikernes also explores the possibilities of harmony and harmonic development more than we've seen him do on previous albums. Despite the fact that the chorus is repeated throughout, it is developed sufficiently to keep it from being boring.

The song ends similarly to the first track on this album, with a simplified version of the chorus riff played on a synth, continuing the fade to silence that had started two-thirds through the song.

04. Haugaeldr (Burial Mound Fire)

A meditative keyboard line marks the beginning of this sombre, meditative piece. This does well to reflect the theme of death and departure implied by the title. It continues with a steady beat, with a drone being embellished by a second synth line that uses harmonies to mark out some kind of melody.

The drone slows down after a few minutes, and in the slow pace we can hear the sustained sounds behind the initial attack that add a great deal of beauty to this piece.

As if to suggest the burial mound suddenly being lit after a slower prayer, the same Filosofem-esque synth comes in, with all its pomp and grandeur. It gives powerful harmonies which dominate the piece – it is the loudest instrument in the mix, despite the drone's continued presence in the background.

Even with the sudden arrival of the new synth, the pace of the song doesn't change very much, carrying on in its pacing fashion. However, this is not mindless, repetition. Vikernes again showcases his skill, perhaps having learned from criticism of his first two ambient albums, drawing out rich harmonies that feel ethereal in nature.

Nearer the end of the piece, a bell-like synth brings out the main melody, a lamenting cascade of notes. This melody barely has time to establish itself before the piece begins to fade, signifying the burning of the body – of the soul of the deceased being released as their body is destroyed.

05. Feprahellir (Forebear-cave) (3.5 out of 5)

With an immediately more percussive tone, and with the first crescendo in the album, this song starts with a fade-in of polyphonic guitar and synth lines. Once again, Vikernes shows off his new musical abilities, and I feel as if this song reflects a great deal of pride (although the subject matter, of the Forebear-cave) is something that Varg takes a lot of personal pride in anyway.

The bass drum comes in, accompanied by a symbol, giving this piece a more defined sense of rhythm. While the piece had enough attack that it didn't need percussive support, the drums certainly did nothing to help the piece, and added a more interesting texture to this piece.

While the main riff does repeat itself a lot, the chords behind it change so radically that it feels at times like a totally different tune. This is key – without this change the song would have fallen into the same minimalist trap that, for example, "Moti Ragnarokum" fell into on the "Daudi Baldrs" album.

Once the mysterious chorus has faded to silence, the main melody returns, with a bit more spring in its step, on a dulcimer. This might be a device Vikernes uses to signify a renewed interest in the Forebears caves that he cares so passionately about.

06. Sólargupi (Sun-god)

This is the piece I actually dislike on the album. It starts off in a very similar fashion to the other songs on this album (which isn't so bad, and this isn't why I take issue with it), with a guitar melody accompanied by an occasional drum that builds itself up to the chorus.

And then in comes the most annoying, mood-shattering synth I have ever heard. It sounds like a chorus of Alvin and the Chipmunks, with Foamy the Squirrel singing lead!

If I were looking at this objectively, beyond my taste (because, I'll accept, my hatred of this chorus sound he used is purely a personal taste thing, and other people might love it) I'd probably say that the synth plays an interesting melody with a lot of variation.

I find the guitar and drum backing more than acceptable in this song – they're the only thing in this song I can bear to listen to, really.

The song ends with a chorus-to-fade that makes me glad to see the back of the worst song on the album!

If there really is a sun-god, he/she/it is seething with rage right now.

07. Ganga at sólu (Deasil)

Starting off with a nice acoustic guitar, accompanied by a humble bass guitar, this piece at first did nothing to offend me. While reminiscent of many of the openings on this album, it was significantly more varied, and faster.

And then…

In came that dreadful synth choir!!! To put it in the Norse, "Heilir Alvin and the Chipmunks!"

Again, while I probably would have loved this piece if it weren't for that one god-awful synth in there, it's so awful that it overrides any love I might have had for this song.

However, it does have some comforting guitar and bass passages that give one something to enjoy in this stream of crap.

I don't even know what the English title means, so I can't comment on the story behind this song. All I can say is that this is probably the second-worst song on the album. It will destroy your meditative mood even more.

08. Hið (Bear's Lair)

A powerful start to this song, with the Filosofem synth instantly grabbing your attention, pulls you in to the world of mystery surrounding the "bear-cult" which Varg and Marie obsess about in this film.

The Filosofem synth couples up with another synth which plays a slightly lower register, setting the chords. This is the most distorted synth in the whole album, and might not be unheard of in some industrial or 80's synth music. In this song Vikernes juxtaposes the rising undertones of the Filosofem synth with the descending, distorted tone of this newer synth.

In the middle of the song, one of these synths will play, and the other will follow in a call-and-response fashion. To mark the climax of their sexual congress (or the climax of their battle, depending upon how you wish to view it) a choir comes out playing a single note which distinguishes the harmony created by these two notes.

As these clashes (though I should note that the notes are not discordant in any way) intensify, the choir is joined by a couple of notes played by a guitar or lute, to give some sense of rhythm to a piece that up until that point had a very prominent sensation of drifting.

Eventually the choir and the guitar fade, and the two synths continue their call-and-response dance. I think this is Varg trying to show how humans once relied on the support of the ancient gods and profited so well from it, and how now we are left out of commune with our deities and our history. The call and response slowly fades to the end of the piece, which I think is symbolic of our constant fighting among ourselves, bereft of the divine support we so clearly need.

09. Heljarmyrkr (Death's Darkness)

I'm not quite sure what the first note in this piece is. Rather, I can't tell what instrument it's played on. It sounds a lot like a didgeridoo, though I know that guitars can sometime produce a similar sound if tortured in abhorrent ways!

Perhaps it's because the tangy sound breaks me out of my vogue a little (as if the previous two tracks hadn't done that already!) but I didn't feel as if this set a sombre enough theme for death's darkness. Then again, Varg doesn't necessarily think death is a bad thing. He one said (I'm paraphrasing here), "Death isn't a problem, only dishonour is." So it could be that he views death is a more positive light than the rest of us and so doesn't feel the need to treat the subject with such reverence.

The synth in the opening reminds me a lot of the synth used on "Han Som Reiste".

The rest of the song is heavily dominated by shimmering synths with a sharp tone in the background that rises and falls as the note is held. They sound very artificial to me, although the fact that they alternate from being played to your right ear to your left ear is remarkably effective.

As with previous tracks, the melody is hinted at, rarely being properly stated. Here it serves as a pretty good metaphor for death. Our ancestors, and even our clerics in the modern day, cast glimpses at the afterlife, and we get little snippets of information with no-one ever seeing the full picture. Well, no-one seeing the full picture and returning to tell the tale, anyway!

10. Mâni vestan (West of the Moon)

Bass is back! The bass comes back in this song, taking a more important role in the early intro. It is accompanied by the usual drum, and after a few seconds, by an acoustic guitar also. These three instruments work together to set the tone before the Filosofem synth comes in. This synth shimmers like the moonlight, with either strings or a choir in the background.

Eventually the synths disappear, leaving in their place the acoustic guitar, bass and drums once more. The drums play very softly, teasing us with the possibility of percussion. After this small break, the synths return, with the bass becoming louder, providing rhythm in this dreamy piece.

One has to listen very closely here to pick out the tunes – a lot of them are very quiet. For example, in one of the guitar-bass-drums sections, the guitar line is quieter than the bass even though it plays the melody.

While this piece doesn't repeat, I'm sorry to say I don't find it very interesting. The synth lines are foreboding and interesting, giving us something to latch on to, but aside from them there is little of interest here. There is melody, but it is uninteresting and doesn't grab the listener (at least, it doesn't grab me).

Eventually the synth lines fade to silence, to be broken at the end by a louder return of the guitar and bass, playing a similar line to the intro, simultaneously, bringing a more satisfactory end to a rather bland piece.

11. Sólbjurg (Sunset)

This has got to be my favourite track from the whole album. Even when I listened to this for the first time and had been turned off to the other songs, I suddenly perked up and paid attention to this one.

A slightly percussive synth into gives the harmonic accompaniment that will support the melody later. Breaking from his newfound style in the other tracks on this album, Varg gives us the melody straight away. It is a complex one, played on what sounds like a cross between a dulcimer and glockenspiel. It is not formed from a couple of simple riffs repeated, rather the chorus is a complex melody which takes different turns and explores new territory with each passing second.

I also note that the keyboard playing on this album is significantly more complex. One of the worries I had with Burzum becoming a purely ambient project is that, let's face it, Varg isn't a very good keyboard player. I suspect a lot of what he has played before is done with one hand alone, playing one note at a time, like on Daudi Baldrs. It could be that the reason he chose to use his guitar, bass and drums on this album is because he lacks a lot of technical skill on the keyboard. However, whether or not he is playing it with two hands or one, this song includes more developed keyboard lines with chords and everything!

Though he's no Beethoven yet, Varg could be getting there!

Varg takes the two main melodies here, for the chorus and verse, and harmonizes and modifies them to create an incredibly dynamic piece. This is a brilliant track. It ends with a final repetition of the harmonic line from the chorus, ending with a reserved but triumphant coupling of the dulcimer and the shimmering harmonic synth.

Final Thoughts :

This album requires a little bit more thought than Burzum's previous ambient works. One needs to remember that this is intended to be background music. It becomes quite apparent after a couple of songs, and anyone expecting another "Daudi Baldrs" is going to be sadly disappointed.

Overall a tremendous, dynamic effort, despite a couple of bad apples. Varg certainly delivered on his promises about this album!

As an album as a whole, it gets 3 out of 5 from me!

-Levi Talvi

Sword-And-Sorcery Stuff

This is going to be a little article I write every week about something in the sword-and-sorcery world that I want to promote, or that I think is really good with a similar ethos to dungeon synth, outside of music.

So this month I'd like to draw your attention to a game (or series of games) that I really love and think that everyone interested in dungeon synth would probably enjoy.

SPOILER ALERT!

The game series in question is the Gothic game series. Currently released are Gothic 1, 2 and 3, with a fourth one in progress. It's made by Piranha Bytes, a company also responsible for "Risen", another brilliant game in a similar vein to the Gothic series.

I'm going to focus on Gothic 1 this issue. On the next one, if I feel like moving on to something else, "Sword-And-Sorcery Stuff" will have an article about Gothic 2. If not, we'll talk about something else instead.

SPOILERS BEGIN HERE!!!

The story of Gothic 1 is rich and interesting. It begins with a cinematic explaining how King Rhobart III needed magical ore to help in his war against the Orcs, and so he sent all prisoners of his lands to work in the ore mines. Because people kept trying to escape from the mine, the King called together the best mages in the land to create a magical barrier that would prevent anyone leaving. However, when the mages did this, the barrier grew out of their control, trapping them inside as well.

Soon afterwards, there was a coup, and the prisoners took control of the colony. These prisoners eventually separated into separate camps. The Old Camp mined ore and gave it to the king at the trading point in exchange for food and luxury goods from the outside world, and they were controlled by Gomez and the Fire Mages. The New Camp mined ore and hoarded it in hopes that they would one day be able to detonate the magical ore and blow up the barrier that imprisoned them, and they were controlled by Lee and the Water Mages. The Sect Camp traded with the two other camps in weed that grew in their swamp, having no business to do with ore. Instead, they prayed to their god, known as The Sleeper, to lead them to freedom. They were controlled by Cor Kalom and their spiritual leader Y'Berrion.

SPOILERS FOR GOTHIC 2 ALSO BEYOND THIS POINT!

While one does not get a full appreciation of this in Gothic 1, in Gothic 2 we learn the unique dynamic of the war in this series. The war is in part a racial war, but also a religious war. Gothic does not fall into the typical fantasy cliché of a war between orcs and humans simply because they hate each other over racial differences. Gothic frames it in the context of an eternal battle between the gods, with the orcs being the chosen people of the God of destruction, Beliar, and the humans being the chosen people of the God of justice, Innos.

In this war, people can and do change sides. There is also middle ground, which adds a great deal of nuance, in the form of a neutral god. The Orcs, worshipping Beliar, are set on destroying humankind mainly because it is the edict of their God. And the reverse applies to the humans.

But in Gothic 1 little of this matters, as the human camps control the penal colony encased by the Barrier.

This game is fascinating because it not only has a rich and intricate storyline (which I won't ruin for you any further – play it yourselves!) ; it is also one of the games in which fighting isn't your only option. Don't get me wrong, you do have to fight to progress, but it is possible to have a lot of fun in the game without fighting. You can smoke weed, drink beer, cook stuff, trade and accumulate a lot of ore (the currency in the game) which you can even use to place bets! And even when you do have to fight, Gothic is one of these games that encourages creative and intelligent thinking. You can get ahead very quickly if you use your terrain to your advantage, for example. If you carefully calculate your fights, you're far more likely to come out on top than if you were playing, say, World of Warcraft. Gothic is a great game, that I would thoroughly recommend for all of our readers!

-Levi Talvi

Review of
"Yggdrasil…Nature…Anthems"

"Yggdrasil…Nature…Anthems" is the second album/demo from the German dungeon synth band, Dolch.

Released in 1997, this record is extremely difficult to come by. As a whole, this album is typical and definitive of the dungeon synth genre (not to criticize it by any means!) I wish I knew more about its creator or the context of it to talk about it, but I don't.

I will comment on the album title and cover art, and then we will proceed to the song-by-song analysis like with my review of the recent Burzum album.

The name implies that this album is centred around the Norse mythology, and indeed the Norse creation myth is implied through the title, "Yggdrasil…Nature…Anthems" (Yggdrasil of course being the tree of life, "livets trae"). One can safely assume the creator is an Odalist, as a lot of strong Odalist themes persist in the song titles and around the man on the tree are Nordic runes. Also a serpent with a great symbolic resemblance to Jörmungandr wraps itself around the band logo.

One last general point ; this album is quite interesting in that it features vocals, which is quite rare in the mostly instrumental genre of dungeon synth. The vocals are distorted beyond recognition, though they add a concept of storytelling and human connection to the music.

And now, on with it song-by-song!

Cover art for "Yggdrasil…Nature…Anthems", 1997.

01. Gods Of War In The Truimphal Procession

This song started off with a drum solo that was not only as triumphant as the title lead me to expect, but also was quite reminiscent of "Silvester Anfang" from Mayhem's first album. It sounds like it was done on a MIDI keyboard, with only a bass drum setting being employed. Its use is still very dramatic, and builds anticipation in the reader for the bold trumpet line that marks the beginning of the melody.

The melody starts off in a truly minimalist style, with subtle variations on a simple yet captivating melody. It starts off simply with a slightly distorted trumpet line, carrying on the regal theme. The trumpets are accompanied by those same banging drums, playing the same faster rhythm that was heard towards the end of the drum solo.

Later on, the empty space between the mezzostaccato trumpets are filled in by brief interludes of strings. These interludes take the lead role after a while, as the trumpet drops out. There is a bar or two of pure strings, with some plucked strings playing a harmonic staccato line on top of the string section melody.

Soon enough, though, the drums come back in, and with them the trumpets. The trumpets sound more distorted this time, and more synthetic. The pounding drums accompany them as usual, this time with a steadier beat. There are periods of quasi-drum solos, where the drum isn't the only instrument playing, but the trumpets are significantly quieter. Dolch manages to alter the volumes of instruments thusly without creating a disjoined effect, which is very hard to do with MIDI instruments. As the song moves on to the next melody, the trumpets do a very weird fluttering ascent which sounds pre-programmed and artificial. It didn't do very much for me, but it didn't last very long and so didn't cause too much disruption.

The following section features a very quiet string melody dwarfed by a brazen drum line, with liberal use of cymbals. The drums in the latter part of this song are more varied though, with tom toms, floor toms and hi-hats being employed (all MIDI synth sounds, I assume). It ends with banging drums and an equally loud string melody being played along it, though one gets the feeling that the melody here is of lesser significance than the percussion.

A promising start to the album indeed!

02. Tumultus

For the less classically inclined, 'tumultus' means 'storm' in Latin, and is probably a reference to Thor creating thunder whenever he is angry.

In sharp contrast to the ending of the last piece, the intro is a sort of musical calm before the storm. It is a simple, yet beautiful harp line, with just as much variation and counterpoint as the previous one. This appears to be played with both hands, unlike the multi-layered melodic lines of the first song which were likely played with only one hand. The melody sounds almost modal, and is very Medieval in tone.

This song also features the first vocals we hear on the album, though they are indecipherable and we have no idea what the lyrics are. They are whispered, sounding almost like blowing winds.

Suddenly, a drumroll breaks the delicate balance.

A brass line accompanied by slow pounding drums, and other strange sounds (something very raspy and also an instrument that sounds a bit like a xylophone and scattering bugs at the same time). The slow brass and drums build up tension, with notes slowly rising and falling in pitch as they are sustained, until a much louder, more assertive trumpet line breaks us into a new melody.

This new melody is accompanied by far fewer drums than the middle section of this song, but its volume and strength cause it to dominate. Played with two hands to allow harmony and to boost the volume in the last section, the melody here is as rich as it is in the rest of the song, but that is easily overlooked in face of the sheer volume of the brass that brings this piece to a dramatic and jarring end.

03. Stormdance – Autumn Kisses

I wonder why Dolch put a dash in the cover. At first I thought it was a cover, but I've searched all over and can't find an artist with either name (though Stormdance would also be an awesome name for a dungeon synth project). It could still be an artist he knew personally whose music never got out though. Because it's so ambiguous I'll just assume it's an original.

The song itself starts off rather rhythmically, with an odd synth line I can't quite pin down to any one instrument playing a relatively slow-paced tune. Slow war drums and a tambourine (or other similar instrument) accompanied it.

Then, after the strings slow down even more (momentarily), they break into a dramatic, fast-paced section, with a ground bass in the strings section topped with staccato notes in a higher register. Crashing cymbals heighten the tension to a running pace, until a moment of peace ensues, with a gentle string section providing a background for a trumpet and a slightly distorted dulcimer to weave out a series of apologetic notes.

A short pause, with bass-laden brass sounds plodding slowly along with a steady drum beat.

Then, all that ends. In its wake is a gentle yet confident return of the strings. Rising ominously above them, are the vocals, now distorted even further. They sound like a demon at its summoning. As before, one cannot make out any words, which makes this piece even more mysterious. The swiftly changing tempo and instrumentation further add to the magic of this track.

However, while still under the spell of this demonic voice, the strings reach their climax and completely change course. They begin playing a fast line with a pedal tone and a steady drumbeat. The riff here is only repeated a couple of times, embellished little, before the song slows down yet again to reveal a more relaxing side to these strings. After one last calm period, the same fast-paced riff with the pedal tone is repeated for the rest of the song, with the minimalist variation I have come to expect from this band. The riff morphs through strings, then to a trumpet, then back to strings again. All the while, a rapid drumbeat, with building momentum, races on behind it, leading up with the strings to a glorious crescendo at the end.

04. Enthroned Winter

What immediately struck me about this song, before even hearing a note, was the name. It seems like it would be much more at home on a black metal album than a dungeon synth one (perhaps a title candidate for the "winter synth" genre?).

Regardless, this is a fairly interesting song.

While it starts off in a similar fashion to the preceding track, it is less percussive and with a quicker melody. This initial melody in the intro is broken down to its most essential notes which are used as accompaniment for the louder strings synth which rises above it proudly, playing a beautiful melody that still expresses the darkness of winter. This darkness is perhaps exaggerated by the presence of that same demonic voice heard before.

The song then changes its mood, becoming happier and almost jovial. With a buoyant trumpet line being backed up by pleasant strings, the vocals come out more audible than they are on the rest of the album. One could almost make out words here, giving the idea of a bard telling a tale about a great winter feast.

Perhaps this isn't as good a candidate for the "winter synth" genre, then…

Preceded by a rhythmic strings melody with no other accompaniment, the piece ends with portato stabs from that same string synth.

05. Forest Murmur

Not only my favourite song on the album, I may very well consider this my favourite song in the whole dungeon synth genre. It was in fact this song that first introduced me to dungeon synth and led me on this wonderful musical journey. So, needless to say, I have a lot of love here.

The song starts off with a brilliant trumpet line. In true minimalist fashion, the original melody is taken and developed in various ways. There is a sort of duplicity in the opening section of this song, with bells providing a counterpoint melody that develops in just as much intricacy as the trumpet one does. The bells bounce along merrily, changing in sync with the trumpets, until they both slow down to mark the start of the pre-chorus.

In the pre-chorus, the strings take a background role, while the trumpet takes centre stage. This role continues into the first exposition of the chorus itself, with the strings playing only two notes over and over in the background (F and C, to be precise), while the trumpet (or a similar sounding synth, I suspect it might be a different one) hints at the chorus line.

After a brief exposure to the chorus, the trumpet plays a portato riff (which develops a little, but stays close to its original form to better preserve the rhythmic function it serves) while the strings play a very quiet version of the chorus riff with no variation. In this part, the drums are also heard for the first time.

When the chorus returns, it is more sombre, with the trumpet playing the main melody and a solemn backing by some other brass instrument that plays plodding single notes. We also hear the dark vocals again, though less ominous and scary than they were on previous tracks.

A musical phrase similar to what we heard with the entrance of the drums returns, only this time much more boldly. Like the first time, it is only very fleeting and drum-saturated before the song moves on to the third and final section.

Another repetition of the chorus ensues, this time with a third synth line providing even more musical development. The strings still play their usual F and C accompaniment, and above them the trumpet blasts out its familiar chorus riff, and the icing on the cake here is a third synth which interweaves itself so beautifully to add counterpoint to this truly polyphonic chorus.

Once this final repetition of the chorus comes to the end, a brief drum and tambourine solo ensues, which carries on into the final section of this song. This section is marked by a very self-assured trumpet sound blaring out over the drums. A couple of repetitions establish the melody before the synth strings return, this time playing pizzicato embellishments.

The coda of this magnificent piece is a sustained note from the trumpets, while the strings are given the last note with their rhythmic plucking drawing in to the close.

06. Nocturnal Skyfall

While significantly shorter than the other pieces on this album, "Nocturnal Skyfall" is very atmospheric. It begins with a simple tambourine and drum line (both very gentle) with a slow, dark synth riff that consists of single notes held for a few bars. These notes slowly raise tension as the drums in the background morph to sound like thunder. The piece ends almost as quickly as it began, chiming in at under two minutes, with the windlike mixture fading away. In spite of its brevity, it is a great ambient piece that induces a great atmosphere.

07. Middle Ages of the 21st Century

This very modal song expresses a desire that I (and I think many of the readers too) connect very strongly too. It explores the love for the Middle Ages and a wish to relive those experiences and those times. These notions are central to the very core of dungeon synth and this is one of the reasons I say this album is both typical of and defining of the genre.

The song starts off with a harpsichord (which just so happens to be my favourite instrument!) playing a quite rhythmically complex section, soon accompanied by strings playing an embellished counterpoint melody on top of it. These are eventually joined by soft drums playing in the background, barely noticeable.

At some point the harpsichord gives way to the strings, being replaced by a MIDI choir (which is not all that unrealistic or annoying, as far as most MIDI choirs go). The combination of the strings and the choir make this piece feel almost like a dream. It conjures images of cathedrals, of monks singing vespers, of plainchant. And above all, the ambience of this piece is overwhelmingly awesome! Whispered vocals towards the end of this song aid in creating and sustaining that mood, that fantastic atmosphere.

In the same vein of the previous track, "Middle Ages of the 21st Century", while sadly quite short in length, injects a more meditative sense of atmosphere into an album with a lot of rapid motion and pounding percussion. This adds to the variety of the album as a whole and is truly an excellent piece.

08. Children of Yggdrasil

The concluding song, "Children of Yggdrasil" starts off in a more mild-mannered fashion than I expected. I expected the album to end on a high, to go out with a bang (perhaps literally, if the creator had put enough weight on the percussion). Rather, the intro to this song was a slow melody played on an ethereal MIDI choir that sounded quite spacey. It wasn't too electronic as to detract from the mood of the album, so it served a good enough role as a precursor to the dynamo that is the final piece of this amazing album. It is incredibly quiet, barely even noticeable at first, easily mistaken for white noise unless one increases the volume. Even more innocuous are the drums in the intro. These are surprisingly fast-paced but are pretty much inaudible, played very quietly on a bass drum MIDI setting.

The pompous arrival of the brass after about a minute is quite startling, in extreme contrast to the quiet solitude of the choir before. Everything gets louder. The drums go from blending into one dim rasping noise to being a solid force, with fast drum rolls used to move between repetitions of the main riff in the first section. The choir also returns, distinctly audible this time. However, it sounds different now. Perhaps this was achieved through a different MIDI setting, or through editing effects.

Later on the grandeur of the drums and brass vanishes, leaving behind two interweaving synth lines that dance between each other in intricate harmonic movements. When this passage concludes, cymbals and a tambourine herald the arrival of a new, more sinister synth line (still on a strings setting) with the clearest vocals on the album. These vocals bring the storytelling aspect of dungeon synth to the forefront of this song – it is a controversial area to go, but I think Dolch did it very well here.

The voice and drums and strings all vanish, giving one the impression that the song is over. But this is merely a ruse ; a plucked strings melody (albeit a very quiet one) takes root immediately afterwards. This beautiful melody develops itself in the fashion I have come to expect from this artist, and soon melts away to have its role replaced by a dulcimer playing variations on the same riff that the plucked strings did. Later on some strings are added to the mix, which fade to a final appearance of the demonic voice. Heavily distorted as before, two voices in unison utter some kind of poem (I assume) with no musical accompaniment. And on that chilling note this brilliant album, a true pillar of dungeon synth, finds its rest. Five out of five!

-Levi Talvi

Interview with Hrungnir

Dungeons of Darkness interviews the mastermind behind the one-man dungeon synth band Hrungnir, MacTaidh!

A new act on the horizon, Hrungnir has released little so far, although they have a very promising career ahead of them with some fascinating work coming up. Dungeons of Darkness readers should keep their eyes peeled, and we'll certainly be watching this band for when their new material is released. MacTaidh's dedication to music and his attitude is both inspiring and refreshing. We have no doubt that his musical career will succeed, and we wish him the best of luck with it!

Interview on next page.

Interview with Hrungnir, part 1

Levi :

Tell me a little bit about you, your musical history, and the history of your band.

MacTaidh :

Hrungnir was formed in the summer of 2013 by myself as the sole member. Hrungnir is actually my first time ever composing music in the 26 years I've been alive, and is the first serious music project I've ever been a part of. I do not know much about music theory, and to be quite honest I do not even know how to properly play the keyboard! But I have always adored music as one of the greatest aspects of human life, and my desire and will to create music that expresses my ideals is strong enough that lacking prior experience and a musician's background won't stop me. One night I was listening to the Ukrainian band Dark Ages and thought to myself "Fuck it, I can do this too!", and that night Hrungnir was born. I stayed up the entire night planning the concepts and the first demo was recorded shortly after.

Levi :

Tell me about the first Hrungnir EP. What was your ethos/goal going into it?

MacTaidh :

The demo Hymns to Bragi contains the first two songs I have ever composed. While the tracks are very basic, the goal of the demo was to give listeners the general idea of Hrungnir, which is dark ambient / dungeon synth music heavily rooted in myths, legends, battles, and the ancient cultures of the past. This demo also allowed me to develop the basic formula for Hrungnir songs. Each song has a specific concept, and the music serves as a representation of that idea. The song Fire Burns the Cimmerian Nightsky is a song about a bloody battle in the homeland of Robert E. Howard's Conan. The other track The Chants of Old Heroes is about a warrior falling in battle and joining the gods in Valhalla. For each song I wrote 'lyrics', which describe the story and allows the listener to have a better understanding of what the song represents. In Norse mythology Bragi is the skaldic poetry god, so I figured it would be an appropriate title for a music release.

Levi :

Who/what are your influences? What do you do to get inspired? And where do you draw your inspiration from?

MacTaidh :

Musically, I am influenced by a variety of sources. I am a die hard Metal fan and although Hrungnir is not metal by any means, bands such as Candlemass, Manowar, Bathory, Burzum, old Solitude Aeturnus always inspire me. These are bands that create an intense atmosphere and take the listener to other realms. As far as dark ambient and dungeon synth, I am a huge admirer of Lord Wind, Blakagir, Dark Anges, Wojnar, and of course Summoning and Caladan Brood, who bring the best of both worlds, metal and ambiance! Conceptually, I am inspired by our ancestors, old legends, brave warriors, ancient wisdom, and all kinds of folklore and mythology (although in the project I focus mainly on Norse, Slavic, and Celtic myths).

Levi :

I noticed your band name is Norse. What does it mean? (I'm learning Norse myself) and why did you choose that language in particular?

MacTaidh :

Hrungnir is the name of the mightiest giant in Norse mythology, he is also known as "The Brawler". In the myths Hrungnir challenges Odin to a horse race, enters Asgard as a guest, gets drunk, is challenged to a fight and *and ultimately killed by Thor, although a stone from the battle is lodged in Thor's head and remains there until his death at Ragnarok. But this specific tale is not the reason why I chose the name for the band. The giants (which is actually a misleading translation, the actual name of these beings is closer to the word 'devourers') are as powerful as the gods in many ways, but represent the chaotic animating forces of nature; winter, darkness, night, the grave. Hrungnir was one the greatest manifestation of these forces! Because Hrungnir is dark music, it needed a dark name, and a name based in mythology since that is a central point of the band as well. I do not use my real name for the band, but the name MacTaidh is my artistic manifestation as the creative force behind Hrungnir, and it is the original Gaelic form of my family name used by my Celtic ancestors.*

Levi :

Would you ever do Hrungnir live?

MacTaidh :

No, I do not feel that the power of Hrungnir is appropriate for a live setting, and will never perform it live. Hrungnir is not meant to be music that you listen to in the company of others, I will expand more on this in the following questions.

Levi :

What is your ideal audience like? Do you even have one?

MacTaidh :

I do not have an ideal audience, I can only hope that fans of Hrungnir are people who really understand and relate to what I am trying to do.

Levi :

Where and when is it best to listen to your music?

Interview with Hrungnir, part 2

MacTaidh :

Hrungnir is meant to be an introspective journey, it is meant to take the listener into the world of everything I describe in the songs. Because Hrungnir has no vocals, I have to rely on purely musical elements to tell a story. For example, The Chants of Old Heroes starts with a very dramatic choir, which is the sound of the Valkyries flying over the battlefield, watching the protagonist warrior fight with valor and fury. After this, you can hear the sound of thunder and just a single note is played, this represents the warrior dying. Finally, the song turns into a more upbeat folk melody, and this represents not only the warrior's glorious entry into Valhalla, but the scalds back in the realm of man singing praise in his honor. The music may be very basic, but there is more to it than it may first seem, which is why I always include a written description of the song concepts. Because of this, Hrungnir is best listened to alone, when one has time to focus and dream, and escape the machine that is empty fucked up modern world.

Levi :

What gear do use to record? And what audio recording software do you use? (Mixcraft, Ableton, Pro Tools, etc...)

MacTaidh :

All of Hrungnir's music is written and performed on a Casio WK200 keyboard. The songs are recorded at my friends home studio, which we call Dungeon Goat Studios. We use Reaper to record, this tool is very powerful and perfect for recording this style of music.

Levi :

Where do you hope to go with Hrungnir?

MacTaidh :

Hrungnir is the start of my musical journey, so I hope to improve as a song writer and unleash even stronger material as the project progresses.

Levi :

What is your opinion on other forms of fantasy escapism outside of music (RPG's, video games, books, etc...)? Do you think they are conducive to altering one's spiritual state?

MacTaidh :

As a kid I was first introduced to fantasy through video games such as the original Zelda, and later on with old RPG's like Chrono Trigger and Final Fantasy. These days I don't have the time to dedicate myself to video games, but I think they can be as effective as novels are for allowing people to explore their imagination and become bewildered by the concepts of honor, valor, sorrow, loss, pride, revenge, and victory. I read as often as I can, and aside from mythology I am a huge fan of Robert E. Howard and H.P. Lovecraft. The dark worlds and epic heroes created by these literary masters inspire me constantly.

Levi :

Anything you'd like to say to our readers and your fans?

MacTaidh :

I sincerely thank every one of you for your interest not only in my band, but the dungeon synth genre in general. It takes a special kind of individual to dedicate the patience and energy that dungeon synth requires, and I think fans of this kind of music are truly artistic individuals with the boldness to think for themselves and not follow what every one else does or thinks. You are part of the true underground! And thank you Levi for your time, it has been a pleasure!

Review of "Noz-Veil"

"Noz-Veil" demo is the last known recording of the dungeon synth band Emglev.

Little seems to be known about the creator of this. I think it is most likely a one-man act (then again, most dungeon synth is), and from what I read online the creator is French and a lot of the lyrics were inspired by French culture and history.

This should make for a really great demo! I quite liked his first one, and have high hopes for the "Noz-Veil Demo". So, let's being with the song-by song review!

01. An Anon Katren

Chilling bells mark a sombre start to the demo. The song I can best describe one word – ethereal. These bells reminded me of the beginning of "Black Sabbath" by Black Sabbath. The first few notes are a prominent melody that stuck in my head, and I think could have been developed into something more interesting, but sadly wasn't.

That's not the ethos of this piece though. It greatly lacks percussive elements. Most of the time we hear something that sounds like a mix of strings and a very spooky, dreamy choir that sounds brilliant for a MIDI recording (if that's what it is).

The mood of this piece is very dreamy, as if one is floating into a new world. But this mood, this new world, isn't entirely benevolent. It's creepy; it has a somewhat more sinister aspect to it, like that feeling of trepidation when going through a magical forest at night, really. That's the image this song plants in my head, with its beautiful dulcimer interludes and choir backing.

At the end, we see the more artificial side of a piece that had felt so vivid and natural until that moment. The strings/choir combination jumps to a higher interval, then fades to the bass notes of the string section being held as they all fade away. When the note is held for so long, the echo and the unnaturally constant and precise vibrato on the vocals tells us that this is definitely a MIDI recording. I felt this aspect of the ending took away from the magic a little, but it was so good while it lasted that I'm not complaining!

02. Tuchen Kador - An Torgenn Eus Kador-veur

From the onset, this piece is decidedly more Medieval-sounding than the previous one. It's not quite as easily placed as the harpsichord-laden song "An Eured Ven" from Emglev's previous, unreleased, demo. Though it has a much more Medieval tinge to it, with a somewhat different instrumentation and temp, I can't help but feel like I've heard the melodies before.

What is immediately noticeable in this song is the slightly faster tempo and more percussive instrumentation. It sounds like the creator somehow used the same strings that he used on the first track and just gave them a bit more attack. There are also sections where a very quiet section of pizzicato strings draws out some melodies from the airy sounds of the other instruments. Another noticeable trait of both this song and the one before it is that there is relatively little bass. The instruments used are very top-heavy, but when the bass is amplified, it is very dramatic and draws great emphasis to those moments.

03. An Yeun Ellez

This piece starts off in the same dreamy vein as "An Anon Katren", and carried on in a similar way, though it has a decidedly happier tone that invoke images of peaceful meadows more than foreboding forests. As with all the pieces on this demo so far, none of the tunes have really stuck with me – they all seem to wash over me, however much I appreciate them while they're there. The magic they create is still as powerful as ever, and very much enjoyable despite the transient nature of this song.

04. Outro – Treizh

Significantly shorter than the other pieces on this demo, the outro was also particularly heavier, with deep brass instruments blaring out a tune that sounded like the living, breathing soul of the album saying goodbye to us as the magic fades.

Overall, this is a very enjoyable album, with a lot of magic and a great amount of atmosphere. A very enjoyable work of art. It gets three and a half out of five from me!

-Levi Talvi

Finding A Good Keyboard

My dream in writing this magazine is that it will speak to someone and make them want to make music. If I've done that with my writing, I'll be a happy man. And, obviously, keyboards are pretty important in dungeon synth. So here I'm going to outline what you should look for when buying a first keyboard. Believe it or not, there are many different factors, and I made two horrible purchases (although one of them wasn't totally useless for one of the three purposes I'm going to talk about, I outgrew it quickly) before I found the keyboard used today on Gynophagia tracks.

There are three main reasons you will want a keyboard (other than to annoy the neighbors). These are ;

**You want to learn to play the piano*

**You want to record your own music (in this article I'll focus on dungeon synth, though conditions vary with other genres)*

**You want to play keyboard live*

I'll briefly sum up the basics of what you should be looking for in each of these ;

If you want to learn to play the piano

**The keyboard MUST be touch-sensitive.*

Touch-sensitive (sometimes known as velocity-sensitive) means that when you press a note harder, the keyboard will produce a louder note. In this way, it is sensitive to touch, hence the name. Many people just getting into music make the mistake of buying a non-touch-sensitive keyboard because they're usually cheaper (I made this mistake early on!). While a non-touch-sensitive keyboard can help you learn to a degree – I did learn the basics on mine, after all – it usually leaves you with a crippling condition where you press every key with the same amount of strength, as you don't need to be delicate when the volume isn't going to change at all. When you go on to play a real piano, your playing will sound boring and it will obviously all be the same volume. This early learning mistake takes years to overcome (I still haven't quite gotten past it!), so do yourselves a favour early on and get a touch-sensitive keyboard.

This is essential for people wanting to buy a keyboard for any reason. Touch sensitive keyboards usually don't come blow £60

**The keyboard SHOULD be weighted*

Weighted keyboards, like touch sensitive keyboards, are significantly more expensive than non-weighted keyboards. Now, I'll be the first to say that this isn't essential. It's a stylistic thing in many ways – you can put on a live show and record good music on a non-weighted keyboard. The trouble arises when you try to play an actual piano. On an actual piano the keys are made of ivory and are quite heavy as a result. Most keyboards simply have a white bar that extends outwards for the keys, and there is an empty space underneath. In weighted keyboards, this is filled with wood or heavy plastic or something to give the keys a similar feel to a real piano.

BEWARE. Many keyboard manufacturers extend the keys on a keyboard so that they look like they go all the way down and are weighted. Do not be fooled! Oftentimes this is made of the same hollow plastic, and there is nothing inside, making the key itself just as light as any other non-weighted keyboard – you won't be able to play a piano effectively after learning on that! Also, there are such things half-weighted keyboards. These try to strike a medium between the two – the idea is that any musician (especially ones on tour) can use this keyboard relatively efficiently whether they practise on a piano or a non-weighted keyboard. They're very popular with pubs that do gigs, or gig arenas that provide keyboards in the backline, etc, etc…

Some people prefer playing half-weighted keyboards, some prefer full-weighted, some prefer non-weighted. It all depends on your goals. If you want to play a real, acoustic piano, I'd recommend full-weighted. You can always play softer when it comes to a keyboard. I know from experience that it doesn't take very long to adjust. If you're looking to play keyboards live AND record in a studio, I'd recommend half-weighted, as it would allow you more flexibility depending on the circumstances. If you're looking to only record in a studio, I'd recommend non-weighted, as they are usually cheaper and easier to keep.

HOWEVER, personal preference is far more important. If you like one kind of keyboard, play that one!

If you want to record your own music

**The keyboard MUST be touch sensitive.*

It's even more important that your keyboard be touch-sensitive for recording your own music than when you're simply learning, as this will be noticed by everyone. If you're playing every note the same volume to yourself, no-one will care, but if you do that on your music it'll affect the quality terribly. Another dangerous risk is that you may THINK your keyboard is touch-sensitive because when you record different instruments, the dynamics may be different. That will mess with your arrangements. Just save yourself and the world a hassle and get touch-sensitive keyboards, m'kay?

**The keyboard SHOULD have MIDI.*

MIDI stands for "Musical Instrument Digital Interface". And what the fuck is that?

The technology is relatively complicated, but in essence what happens when you press a key on a MIDI keyboard, is that instead of the keyboard itself producing the sound through its speakers, a signal is sent through the MIDI lead (we'll discuss those later) to a computer. This makes the difference between a keyboard and a synth. A keyboard will make noise if you just plug it in and play – a synthesizer will only play a note if it is connected to a computer.

That signal sent through the MIDI lead will be specific to that particular note, and if your keyboard is touch-sensitive, it will also store data on how hard you pressed the key (usually stored as a velocity rating that you can edit in MIDI editing software, between 1 and 127, with 1 being the quietest and 127 being the loudest). So if you press a middle C as hard as you can, a MIDI keyboard/synth will send the following information to your computer : "C4, Velocity 127".

Then, the computer will go through their MIDI database. First, it will find which MIDI instrument you have selected (the great advantage of MIDI, especially for recording your own music, is that you can change between instruments at will) and the MIDI database will have a store of notes where a musician (or choir or orchestra) has played a measure of every note. So, they'll have a recording of middle C being played on a harpsichord, violin, guitar, whatever you want, and they'll have that for every note.

Once it's selected your appropriate note (in this case, C4), it will apply the appropriate velocity to it. So, since the appropriate velocity here is 127 – the biggest possible velocity rating – the computer will make that sound as loud as it possibly can.

And then, it will play it back to you through the computer's speakers.

As you can imagine, all this takes time, and so the majority of MIDI leads cause a latency of about 10miliseconds on average, although you can even get cheap ones with significantly less lag.

Now, this is really just scratching the surface. MIDI technology has many applications and dimensions and an interesting history behind it, which would be far better served with an article all its own. If the readers ask for it, I'll write an article on all I know about MIDI in next month's issue.

But to put the last few paragraphs into two sentences – MIDI is great for recording music (especially dungeon synth) because it lets you use the sounds of any instrument from just playing the keyboard, and afterwards you can edit what you've recorded. You can change the starts and ends of notes, refine it, et cetera… And also, because the sound is taken from a database, and not recorded from the room around you, interfering noise doesn't matter – a crying baby, arguing family, construction team won't be heard on your MIDI recordings like they would on "live" recordings.

**Pressure sensitivity is a plus*

Especially if you're already using MIDI files, this isn't really necessary. And because of the extreme price, it's a feature very few people use. The top-end keyboardists use pressure-sensitive keyboards (if you want to know roughly how big you have to be before you can afford one of these keyboards, Tuomas Holopainen only started using a pressure-sensitive keyboard recently).

What is pressure sensitivity? I hear you ask.

That'll be explained in full in the next section.

If you want to perform live

**MIDI-compatibility is not necessary*

Infact, oftentimes MIDI compatibility could get in the way on stage. There is one potential advantage of it, in that a MIDI-to-MIDI lead (as opposed to regular MIDI-USB leads, which are often just called MIDI leads) allows you to control multiple keyboards at the same time. So, if you were to put three keyboards on top of each other in a stack. Let's say you have a really eerie sound you want to recreate live, similar to the synth sound on "Tuistos Herz" from the Burzum album "Hlidskjálf". The closest thing one can get to recreating that (without knowing the original virtual instrument he used) is combining a bell, timpani, and a tuned gong. All of these can be played on MIDI instruments. With a MIDI-to-MIDI cable connecting these keyboards to each other, you could play a D4 on one of them, and have every keyboard play the same note at the same time. So, even if you just pressed the D4 key on the keyboard with the MIDI bell setting activated, the other keyboards would play their respective instruments – the timpani and gong.

Other than that application, MIDI is largely useless in a live performance setting. I only know of one band (Stam1na) that uses a MIDI keyboard live. In their live performances, they genuinely have the keyboardist's laptop on a little stand nearby, or resting on the keyboard itself, with a MIDI lead connected, and the computer itself being connected to amps. Of course, tonnes of incredibly expensive equipment is required to reduce the lag as much as possible with this set up.

And even without that factor, it just looks fucking retarded! Like he thinks he's fucking Skrillex or something!

Not worth it.

Even if you need to play multiple MIDI instruments at once on stage, many MIDI keyboards will allow you to pre-programme virtual instrument settings with all these instruments combined. So you could create a new virtual instrument setting (imaginatively called "My Virtual Instrument Setting 1") made up of the timpani, gong and bell. With this setting activated, you could play the D4 on one keyboard and have all the other notes sound also, with no clunky MIDI leads necessary.

So, don't bother with MIDI for live performances…

**Touch-sensitivity is a MUST*

If you want ANY kind of dynamic contrast in your keyboard sounds throughout your live performance, you'll need a touch-sensitive keyboard. One trap I've seen a couple of bands do when they perform live is that they think that (especially if they're a metal act) the other instruments can change volume and the keyboard doesn't play an important enough role that its dynamics matter.

What happens in most of these cases is that if they have a piece with a keyboard intro (and how common are those?) which then kicks in with the other instruments for the rest of the song, the keyboard is drowned out. So even if your keyboard plays an important part of the melody (think "Dunkelheit" on Burzum's album "Filosofem") it won't be heard.

So, if you don't want the most traumatic stage experience that a keyboardist can undergo (OK, not THE most traumatic of experiences, but certainly one of them) then make sure you have a touch-sensitive keyboard.

**Pressure-sensitivity is useful*

Now you will have that age-old philosophical question answered for you.

Pressure-sensitivity allows you to alter the volume of a note AFTER you've pressed the key. So, let's say you've played a Cm chord on an organ setting, and you want to raise the volume in a swell before you kick into the next part of the song. On a regular touch-sensitive keyboard, you wouldn't be able to do this live, as the note, once played, will maintain the same volume, as its velocity rating remains the same. You would either have to play the note again, louder (which wouldn't give you a swell) or manually turn up your keyboard amp during the swell.

But with a pressure-sensitive keyboard, you could simply press harder, and the notes would come out louder, and vice versa. One big problem, however, is the price. They're INCREDIBLY expensive, and not worth it unless you're playing a top-end show, however convenient they may be. With correct planning of your live set, you should never find yourself needing this.

General considerations when buying a keyboard for any reason

**Remember that some keyboards appear to be weighed without actually being weighed.*

As mentioned before, this will fuck with your playing if you get the wrong weight on your keys. Especially if you're buying online, make sure you check in the item description and specification that it has the right weighting for you. If you're ordering online, and it doesn't say anything about the weighting, assume that the keyboard is non-weighted. If you're in a store, ask if you can play a floor model to try it out.

**MIDI compatibility is usually a plus, even if it isn't always necessary*

Having a MIDI-compatible keyboard is always useful. Infact, it is so useful that most keyboards these days are made with MIDI compatibility built in anyway. While this does mean paying extra it allows you much more versatility when recording.

**When recording, you will need a MIDI-USB lead (also known simply as MIDI leads) with your keyboard*

You plug the USB end into your computer, and the MIDI lead which says IN (there will be two MIDI ends on the lead, with one USB end, making three in total) into the MIDI socket on your keyboard that says OUT. These leads usually cost £1-5. However, most of these will likely have about 10milliseconds latency on them, which can make recording a bit harder. Luckily, even some £1 MIDI leads have lower latency than this that doesn't cause too many problems.

**Know the difference between a synthesizer and a keyboard*

A synthesizer sends MIDI signals to a computer to produce the noise from the database of sounds it has. In a sense, the sound it makes are synthetic, and that's where the term comes from.

A keyboard almost always comes with built-in speakers that do not require a USB lead. You will be able to simply plug it in to the mains and play the keyboard and hear the sound without needing a computer or any other equipment.

Do not confuse this with the word "synth" used to describe MIDI instruments. The word synth is often used to describe MIDI instruments because all MIDI keyboards are synths (although not all synths are keyboards), so the word synth usually just means a virtual instrument playing MIDI files.

**Bear in mind the size, weight and durability*

Are you going to be taking this keyboard on tour, or is it just going to sit in your home? Are you going to keep it on a table or a stand? How often and how carefully will you use it? These are all factors which, if they aren't properly considered, can cause your keyboard to break down earlier than you think it will. Make sure you have room in your house or bedroom or studio for a 66 key keyboard.

**Think about how many keys it has, and how many keys you need*

Are you a classical musician, or a simple electronic artist? Do you play stuff with two hands or one? Both techniques have their merits, and I'm not praising or condemning either ; but they do have different requirements. Playing with both hands requires AT LEAST a 66 key keyboard. These are usually about one metre in length and weight between five and fifteen kilograms.

But if you're simply playing one-hand melodies that you layer on top of each other, you don't need that and you could get a smaller one about the size of a computer keyboard (the one you use for typing). A lot of these ones don't require a separate charger, and plug straight in to your computer.

**Look out for "flat" keyboards that are advertised like real keyboards*

Flat keyboards are rubber mats that hook up to a set of speakers similar to a MIDI keyboard. You have to put them on a hard surface, like a table, to make any noise from them. And while some are even MIDI-compatible and touch-sensitive, they are no substitute for a real keyboard and should never be bought. As they are much cheaper than regular keyboards, they're a common trap for new buyers. Beware!

-Levi Talvi

Interview with Lord Lovidicus

Dungeons of Darkness interviews Lord Lovidicus.

Interview with Lord Lovidicus part 1

Levi :

Could you start off by telling me about you, your musical history, and the history of your band?

Crow :

I'm a man of many interests. I'm pursuing a degree in Computer Science, I enjoy programming, especially making video games, I've always had an interest in reading whether it was fiction or non-fiction, and music has been a part of my life since I was a child. I grew up learning the drums from my father, from there I expanded my interests on my own, playing piano, and really getting into the guitar.

I was actually in a black metal band from the beginning of high school with my best friend; it was called "Black Tyrants." We came out with like two releases and it was then that I realized that I really preferred to work on my own.

In December 2009, I put a headset next to my keyboard speaker, and started recording what I called "dark ambient" music. I was mainly inspired by the Asmorod release "Dance in the Winter Fog." Out of those recordings came "Windbuchen."

From then on I pretty much followed the same formula, with occasional inspiration from J.R.R. Tolkien. It wasn't until the beginning of 2012 that I heard about this Dungeon Synth genre. The genre thought my music was a pure representation of Dungeon Synth and my album "Trolldom" gained a ton of recognition. From then on I got really attached to the genre and have been writing Dungeon Synth for Lord Lovidicus since.

Levi :

Who/what are your inspirations?

Crow :

My inspirations have changed quite a bit over the years. When I first started out I was really inspired by bands such as Burzum, Mortiis, Asmorod, Summoning, etc... I've always listened to quite a lot of Classical music, so I could imagine that many of my melodies are inspired off of old composers' pieces. As of late, however, I mainly gain inspiration from my imagination. I'll sit and think of some scene from a fantasy based setting. Slowly a soundtrack will pop in my head and I have a place to start. From there I branch out with various complexities added on the song.

Levi :

Interesting. I have a few questions about your latest album, "Forgotten Ruins".

I noticed it has only two songs, but they're both very long. Tell me about that. What kind of story is this album trying to tell? Were these long songs originally smaller songs that you combined to make a longer one?

Crow :

The songs off "Forgotten Ruins" were so long because I realized that no one had done half hour songs in Dungeon Synth since Mortiis, or at least from what I've heard.

I figured it would bring some of that nostalgic dungeon synth spirit back from the 90s. Initially I was going to make an hour long song, but I realized that it was quite a hard thing to do without the song dragging on, so I split it into two 30-min ones.

There is no particular story to the songs. I leave interpretation to the listener. It really is whatever you want it to be. All I do is set up the setting and tone, which explains my highly verbose song titles (haha). Although I will say that "Fyrelight Cave" is an actual place in The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion.

Levi :

Do you get a lot of inspiration from such computer games?

Crow :

Well, other than the Elder Scrolls series, not really. I only get the inspiration from it's lore, rather than the video game, which is why there is substantially a large amount of inspiration from Tolkien's works.

Levi :

Understandable.

Do you take an inspiration from mythology then? Do you read any ancient literature or speak any dead languages (any languages other than English at all?)

Crow :

The only mythology that I have direct inspiration from is Norse mythology. *I own copies of the Prose and Poetic Edda and read them in my spare time.*

Interview with Lord Lovidicus part 2

I do know a bit about Roman, Greek, and Babylonian mythology, but I find Norse to be the most interesting.

I've taken classes in Spanish and know quite a deal to read Spanish, but I have trouble speaking it fluently. I've taught myself some Icelandic, German, Russian, and like a sliver of Norwegian. Although, I'm thinking of taking on either Icelandic or German formally.

Levi :

I'd recommend German if you're gong to use it in real life, Icelandic if you want to learn the ancient languages, or one of the Scandanavian languages.

Switching topic, what gear do you use? And what software do you use to record your music?

Crow :

I used to use a Yamaha keyboard with a Logitech headset to record my music. I would edit the songs in Audacity. I recently moved across the country so I don't have access to my keyboard, although I've found more promise in digitally producing my music through MIDI's with FL Studio, which I also use to record my electronic trance side project, Jotun.

Levi :

So how do you input these notes? Do you use some other MIDI instrument? Or do you use a software that allows you to put notes on a stave and then convert them to MIDI sounds?

And on that note, can you read sheet music? Do you know music theory, and if so how has knowing these influenced your music if at all?

Crow :

FL Studio has a "piano roll" function which opens a screen with notes scrolling vertically in which you plot notes with their length and velocity on a beat/measure format for that specific synthesizer.

Prior to using FL Studio, I recorded all my music by hand on my keyboard. I have no formal training in music, but I've taught myself all I need to know. I taught myself how to read sheet music, and I understand a great deal of music theory, especially from one of my friends in high school, which we tried composing a piano piece together. I've actually come a long way from playing piano, I teach myself a wide variety of classical music from sheet music to play such as Moonlight Sonata mvt. I & III to ragtime tunes by Scott Joplin.

I wouldn't say music theory helps with Dungeon Synth at all. It really takes a different mind set to compose. Of course, I could explain my songs using theory, but it really is about minimalism, melody, and simplicity.

Levi :

How do you manage to get an organic sound from such an input system? Don't you worry that it will make your compositions sound too robotic?

And your attitude seems to be very common in dungeon synth. There seem to be a lot of people in this genre who seem to know very little theory and can't even play piano (some of them I know only play with one hand and layer their MIDI tracks over each other to simulate two-handed playing). But you have to respect their tenacity and their drive. It takes a lot of determination to create music in that setting.

Crow :

I have nothing against those who know little music theory and try to create music.

In my opinion, those who know less about music make more interesting music on the basis that they don't confine their music to contemporary means and standards.

For organic sounding MIDI tracks, I usually start with a preset MIDI. I then edit the MIDI's attack, sustain, decay, etc. I use the Sytrus synthesizer in FL Studio. It has a modulation function with an x and y value. Editing the modulation, and synth wave properties usually does the trick. I used to be worried about the music sounding too robotic, but I realized that nowadays most music is being made via software. I also write techno music, so if the music sounds too "computerized" it doesn't bother me, if anything it makes it more nostalgic for all the old video game MIDI's I used to listen to.

Levi :

True. The artificial sound is distinctive in dungeon synth - I guess it's about finding a happy medium.

Now, I'm sorry for putting you on the spot like this, I know it's going to be a hard question to answer. But I have to know ; you're quite a lot more well-known than the majority of dungeon synth artists. Why is that?

Crow :

Haha that's a good question. If I had to take an educated guess it would be because of my other project Jotun. Jotun gets a lot more recognition than Lord Lovidicus. I saw the statistics, only around 100 - 400 people download Lord Lovidicus albums. The download rates for my Jotun albums was over 2000 for a couple of them. I'd imagine a good amount of my fans like both Jotun and Lord Lovidicus. I really have to thank my friend Xisumavoid on YouTube for getting me recognition through his Minecraft videos which get 10,000s of views.

Interview with Lord Lovidicus part 3

On top of that, I exist on a variety of social media: YouTube, Facebook, Last.fm, the Dungeon Synth blogspot, my record label "Obscure Dungeon Records" advertises me, I've even seen me be discussed on 4chan's /mu/ board.

Levi :

That's brilliant! I hope your success continues to increase.

What are you looking to do with Lord Lovidicus in the future?

Crow :

I have around 5 unreleased Lord Lovidicus songs, some are in production. I'm not sure what I'm going to do definitively. I'm definitely coming out with new releases, although I'm thinking of innovating my style before I do.

I'll probably take a break for a month or two because I've been working on a lot of Jotun related songs recently. I was listening to a lot of Hard Trance and Half-Life 2 soundtrack lately, so I was thinking of implementing that with Jotun.

As for the tone of future Lord Lovidicus, I'm focusing on more ambiance and slower paced songs, but they'll still have a medieval feel to them.

Levi :

Last questions ;

Where can our readers find your music?

And is there anything you want to say to our readers and your fans?

Crow :

All of my YouTube videos have a link in the description to Mediafire where you can download the whole album for that song for free.

I have to say thanks to everyone who listens to my music. I'm really glad for the opportunity to be a part of this magazine, and I'm glad I'm a part of such a diverse and strong genre. Once again, thanks!

Levi :

Brilliant!

Thank you so much.

Listen to the new Lord Lovidicus album, "Forgotten Ruins" on Youtube, and download it from Mediafire!

Review of "The Lightless Lands"

"The Lightless Lands" is what appears to be the only recording released by the dungeon synth band Mists of Darkness. Fronted by a strongly opinionated man named Steve, Mists of Darkness spread from Australia through demo tapes of this album only. And even they were not sent out in the usual fashion. In an interview with the Eternal Damnation magazine, Steve (he really should have chosen an alias…) said that the only way for one to get a hold of a Mists of Darkness demo tape was to mail to him a blank cassette tape with no case whatsoever, with postage (or a SASE, I presume).

In this way it's surprising that Mists of Darkness received any attention whatsoever.

But regardless, it's an interesting demo in the dungeon synth genre. Bit of a shame nothing more has come from this guy (if any of our readers know anything, please write to us and let us know!)

So, as always, let's start with the song-by-song review!

Act 1 – Journey to the Lightless Lands

The low-fidelity recording is immediately transparent. There's a kind of crunching throughout this piece, and I'm not sure whether it's supposed to be a drum or the sound of horse's hooves or something else entirely. There is an audible drum going on, and surprisingly, though everything else is distorted through the poor quality recording, the drum comes out whole and crisp.

I also wonder if this was recorded through MIDI files or analogue. The sound quality would suggest a "live" or analogue recording technique, though it is possible to achieve a similar kind of sound using MIDI keystrokes and editing effects.

The only real melody in this piece is played by the strings, which appear to be just single notes. There isn't very much in the way of harmony or counterpoint here – indeed the strings seem to be the only melodic device in the whole song.

However, what this piece lacks in melodic brilliance, it makes up for with a strong atmosphere. It sets a mystical mood very well, with the drum and crunching sounds building up tension. This all culminates in a rumbling of thunder, which brings about the end of this song.

Act 2 – Encompassed Mystery

A low grumbling noise leads us in to this piece. It sounds very similar to the sounds heard on the track "Dungeons of Darkness" from Burzum's self-titled debut album (which, as you may have noticed, we named ourselves after!)

There appears to be even less melody involved in this piece than the first one. The only note I can easily make out is a very low, rumbling bassline played on an indistinguishable instrument. Staying true to its title, this song creates a real sense of mystery with white noise blotting out any kind of clarity.

Some strange kind of vocals also, almost like ghostly moans, permeate this piece. Every so often, they break through the veil of white noise and rumbling to cast their chilling presence.

Despite its haunting atmosphere, this piece is relatively uninteresting, and offers less to the listener than the first one. Its lack of melody would be permissible if it were of similar length, but this tuneless moaning with a white noise background carries on throughout most of the seven and a half minutes of the song. The only slight change is that towards the latter part of the song that surprisingly clear drum returns, knocking out a simple melody that repeats over and over again until the end of the song, where we're treated to some grumbling sound similar to a gong being dropped in a large cathedral. Very unsatisfactory.

Act 3 – First Vision Of The Lightless Lands

A few thunderclaps mark the start of this album. I do wonder how these effects were created, and I wish Steve had gone into his recording process a little more in his interview.

By this point I was expecting an even more boring piece, smoothed over by plenty of distortion, But that wasn't the case – the thunder sounds almost had a tune to them, leading me to suspect that they were edited keyboard sounds. In the background, the drum beats out a marching melody that captures ones interest while a single note played by strings in the background slowly swells, rising in volume towards an anti-climax.

The drums and thunder all drop away, leaving only the strings. For the first time on this demo it sounds as if more than one melodic note is being played, although the section is very quiet and hard to make out. This leads us on in the same obscure fashion as the rest of this demo. Despite it being more melodic than most of the demo, none of the tune manages to stick with me

Much like the previous track, "First Vision of the Lightless Lands" is unnecessarily long and frankly, at times it's quite boring. This is clearly designed as background music more than anything else, and I guess if one was reading or playing an RPG with this in the background it could be quite enjoyable. But it's inability to stand alone does cause this song, and the album in general, a kind of crippling weakness that inclines the listener to dislike.

Towards the end of the track there are bits of moaning and roaring that truly sound like excerpts from dinosaur reanimations. I don't need to point out how that detracts from the mood. Needless to say, I wasn't thrilled with this piece.

Act 4 – Death of Tranquility

Considering it's entitled "Death of Tranquility", this song doesn't really have any jarring moments, or anything that breaks the tranquil mood. There isn't even the drums! It starts off on a somewhat melodic note, with gentle, TRANQUIL strings playing a sombre, slow-moving melody. At least the mood of this piece matches its title.

The thundery, white-noise sounds Steve throws in throughout this whole album surface again soon enough, and this time they sound like a cross between someone laughing and crying during a thunderstorm (all recorded through a mic that's filling up with the rainwater, of course).

While the strings that play the melody do have some nice dreamy melodies it's not enough to redeem this piece in my eyes, or the album. They seem to be trying to create an atmosphere similar to Emgleu, and while I appreciate the effort, it's too little too late. Although, for once I am starting to pull images into my mind to match this song – the other songs on this album were so unfulfilling that there was nothing for me to latch on to, but here I can definitely see myself walking through an old, abandoned castle that reeks of death while this is in the background.

This song is the longest one on the album, but most of it is, in brutal honestly, waffle, with nothing much worth commenting on. The whole "Dungeons Of Darkness" sound is still very prevalent and heavy here ; a high-pitched hissing on the background sounds very similar indeed. It changes very little throughout, ending on a dull note without much of interest happening.

Unreleased Track

This was either the piece I liked the most or second-most on this demo. Granted, that's not a particularly high bar, but it's something. Although the descending riff that repeats throughout the WHOLE thing did at times get mind-numbing, and was a very jarring sample to constantly repeat. It brought everything in the piece to standstill, leaving a moment or so of silence before going on with the descent. As I listened to this piece, that riff jarred me at times, bored me at times, annoyed me at times and by the end I didn't know what to make of it.

Nonetheless, the repeating riff and the other elements in the song, are somewhat interesting.

As for the demo though, it was simply awful. Not worth listening to unless you're the most die-hard fan of sizzling background music. This demo gets a one out of five for me. And it only got that 'cause of the "Unreleased Track"

-Levi Talvi

Review of "Färd"

"Färd", released in 1995, is the first and supposedly only demo of the dungeon synth act Grim. It was released on cassettes, with a small cover containing only the address of the creator (whose name we don't know).

The cassette cover, aside from having the band name, release year, logo, cover photo, song list and address on it, also contains a brief little message. This doesn't help with the confusion caused by having a very black-metal styled cover photo (the guy's in corpsepaint for Christs's sake!), as the message says "A big 'fuck off' to god and Jesus and their followers." As one might gather, a decidedly more black-metal kind of message than one most dungeon synth artists would put on their releases.

As with the album cover, the cassette itself is fascinating. It seems to take aspects of black metal, film music, and dungeon synth and mix it all together. At times it sounds like listening to a Disney soundtrack in the middle of a thunderstorm, at times like a video game soundtrack and at times almost like church music (which is ironic given the creators aggressive message).

The songs are quite long in length, none being shorter than five minutes.

So, let's get on with the song-by-song review!

01. Spiritual Journey

What's immediately obvious here is the hissing. At the start, a chilling wind accompanied (or augmented by) a sizzling white noise, probably from the cassette quality, leads us in to the melody. It seems to be a combination of strings or a choir. The synth used seems strangely high-pitched, like a sort of toned-down version of the Foamy-the-Squirrel-esque synth Burzum used on a couple of disgraceful tracks from his latest album. This particular synth, however, while bearing a marked resemblance to that terrifyingly awful sound, is different enough to be tolerable.

On top of these, the creator lays some black metal vocals (perhaps all these black metal idioms are evidence of his musical background?). These are echoey, and too distorted for me to make out any words, though I suspect the lyrics themselves are in Swedish. It's a shame the creator didn't include a lyrics sheet.

Once the vocals take a break, the strings that had been playing for a while morphs back into that same high-pitched choir. It sounds less annoying now. This choral moment is particularly interesting, and is one of the reasons this demo reminded me in some ways of choral music. In a very odd choice, the creator here decides to include the raw black metal vocals alongside the melodic choir singing.

While the tunes aren't bad, and certainly do create a good atmosphere, the songwriting isn't particularly remarkable here. The majority of this song seems to be monophonic. Not much of it really stays with you.

This song takes a rather odd turn about three minutes into it.

Personally, I think it was originally two separate songs mixed together. The song literally stops. It sounds like the song has ended and it's the start of a new song. If the song came in the same as before, one could imagine it was just a break in the song. But everything comes to a standstill. Even the white noise/wind cuts out for a second or so.

This new section (or new song, depending upon how you look at it) comes in with a slightly faster melody. By this point, the chorus theme which permeates the entire song becomes apparently to us. It's not altogether a dreadful song, and with the appropriate amount of repetition it becomes nice and familiar.

And the song in general is quite interesting, even though the same two melodies repeat until the end and little new is given to us. It certainly has a lot to offer the listener and does create a good sense of atmosphere. Listeners may at first be taken aback by the odd instrumentation, and the unusual choice of arrangement. Nevertheless, it is undeniably a very original work in dungeon synth (and the rest of the demo follows suit) and would be enjoyable for black metal and dungeon synth fans alike.

02. War March

The song title, in keeping with a lot of things on this demo, sounds like it would be much more at home on a black metal demo than a dungeon synth one. In keeping with its title, and with the black metal vibe, it starts off with a brief drum solo, over which a few spoken vocals are laid. This same drum beat continues to some trumpets which play what seems to be a minimalist, reduced version of Handel's wedding theme. This theme, given to us in long-held notes, carries on with the drums until it breaks off to…one of the odder components of the demo.

Honestly, this was the part of the demo which screamed "Disney" at me. A surprisingly happy melody (especially on a song called "War March", of all things!) played on twin flutes, plays on top of that same drumbeat, which appears to have been on loop since the beginning of the song. The flute melody sounds like children playing. It even has trills and everything! It's just like something we'd hear in a Disney movie when a cute little dog falls over or something.

That surprisingly happy melody is given some melodic variation. An oboe/horn/trumpet comes in occasionally (though very soft, considering how loud these instruments usually are) and plays an interweaving harmonic line. This brass part grows and grows, until is it playing a counterpoint melody all its own alongside the flute. While this is very clever songwriting and quite interesting, it bears little resemblance to its title.

But I feel compelled to forgive this misnomer, as the brass and woodwinds part of this song develop enormously on their original themes in fascinating ways. When your developed theme sounds totally different to your original exposition, that's when you've written something well! And towards the latter part of this song, the creator SOMEHOW manages to take these happy melodies and make them feel scary and melancholy. The added strings and rumbling thunder does help that in some regard, though it's still a real feat of composition.

Then, the creator breaks it all up into chaos. A synth line playing some instrument I have no ability to identify whatsoever, comes in with a melody syncopated with the persisting flute and brass. Throwing everything into disarray, this rhythmic line (however little it does for the rhythm of that section overall) finally brings on that image of a war march.

And once that crash has occurred, there is no doubt. These once-happy melodies become scary, sombre dirges that lead up to the end of the song. In the end, as in war, the drums fall silent, and all that is left is a lonesome bell signalling the end of the fight.

03. Svävande igenom hallarna

"Floating Through Halls" is the English translation of the title that marks the longest track on the demo, chiming in at over twelve minutes. An acoustic guitar plays a Medieval-sounding, fast-paced melody at first, accompanied soon by some interesting synth sounds that aid in melodic development of the main theme. One wonders why the creator chose such a percussive instrument for a piece that's supposed to be about floating. Just another mystery attached to this demo…

Unlike in "War March" however, the initial theme doesn't last very long before it is replaced by another (although the piece does eventually return to the chorus). This interlude is darker than the chorus, more melancholic.

The chorus then takes another riff, before breaking again. Not taking another melodic interval as before – actually breaking like in "War March". It just stops, and starts up again with a new theme. It's even easier to imagine this being separate songs in its inception, considering the mammoth song length. And perhaps that was the creator's intention…

Now the song takes a decidedly more sincere turn, with the almost-happy guitar melody of before replaced with some kind of deep synth line, with spoken word bits accompanying it. The vocals, however, are always in the background in this piece. They aren't all that significant, especially as we don't know the lyrics, and they do far more to add ambience than anything else.

The piece carries on with this same sincere theme slowly developing into something new. We don't see a return of the "chorus" from before (perhaps it wasn't…), instead this melancholic synth line trudges on, only being broken occasionally by a loud, higher-register synth playing a harmonic line on top of it. That same high-register synth ends the track (and the demo) with a great deal of flair, the melody moving around much more than it did on the rest of the track. This much louder and faster synth holds a chord, revealing itself to be a kind of gospel organ, before it cuts out dramatically. And thus the demo ends.

Färd is a brilliant demo, with a lot of ambience and atmosphere, FASCINATING songwriting and curious instrumentation. It's different, and in that it creates something unique in dungeon synth. I hope in the future to find more work from Grim. Four out of five for this one!

-Levi Talvi

Review of "Shrouded In Mystery"

"Shrouded In Mystery" appears to be the only release of the dungeon synth act, Forbidden Pathways. Little is known about them, they don't seem to have done any interviews, or anything like that. All we have from them is this demo and the very blurry album cover. And seeing as we have nothing else to talk about with this band, let's get on with the song-by song analysis!

01. Incoming

This started off rather crunchy, with a kind of storm sound effect that reminded me of the Grim demo I reviewed. As this storm fades, some kind of woodwind instruments (I presume they're MIDI, though I can't tell for sure) come in, playing a decidedly Medieval melody. Two woodwind instruments playing counterpoint melodies accompany a drum for the majority to the song.

There are two main melodies that play throughout this song, the verse and chorus. The chorus remains largely unchanged, although the verse undergoes significant melodic variation. The composition isn't bad. The creator (whoever it is – like for Grim, we don't know their name) certainly shows great skill with polyphony and layering.

While the dynamics aren't the most varied in this piece, there is a slightly crescendo in the final chorus that melts into stillness. The drums give the same beat, and only one other instrument remains, playing the backing melody as the song slowly disappears, ending with the dignified crash of a gong.

02. Dyfed

A cello sound, very reminiscent of "Balderd Baldrs" from Burzum's first ambient album, Daudi Baldrs, leads us in to this song. It doesn't stay very long (though it does return later), along with a cheerful bell of sorts. Some kind of brass instrument then takes over, soon accompanied by a woodwind instrument.

Again, the composition sounds very modal and Medieval, which I have to confess I absolutely love on this demo. The songs really sound like peasant dances, particularly this one with it's bouncy basslines (played by the cello) and rambunctious drumbeats. In general it is a significantly more upbeat piece.

This piece also has enough counterpoint in its melodic structure that you won't be kept bored. The melodies are taken to many new levels, and the varied instrumentation allows the creator to add more harmonic context to this song. The song ends on a very happy note, which sounds almost like the end of a dance. I don't know what "Dyfed" means, but I'm pretty sure from the music that it's something joyful!

03. Wuduaelfen

I THINK that the language that "Dyfed" and "Wuduaelfen" comes from is Saxon. From what I know of Norse, I think this song title could mean "The Wood-Elf", though I'm not certain. Sadly, I still have no idea what Dyfed means.

Musically, the song starts off on a much more sombre basic, with a slow string melody being mournfully layed out before us. Something that sounds like a harp comes in later on top of it, showing a somewhat happier side to this song, but still keeping everything serious and sincere.

Later one a very high-pitched, plucked instrument comes in. It sounds almost like a harp played extremely high up. The instrument itself also sounds more artificial than the other ones. The harp, strings and woodwind instruments in the first section weave between each other and slowly add melodic decoration to the initial theme.

The piece then alternates for a while between the mournful strings melody from the introduction, and the slightly happier melody with that high pitched harp-like thing. All the way, there is plenty of melodic development. Even the drums start to change.

At about three and a half minutes, a new tune is introduced to us. It's caught a little bit in between, neither happy nor sad. Just like in the other songs on this demo, other instruments quickly work their way in until you get a vibrant, developing, polyphonic melody. This section is also particularly more atmospheric than the others. While this piece has, up until now, certainly created a much more sombre mood than the rest of the demo thus far, it hasn't really given off much atmosphere. Now that changes.

The rest of the piece takes us through various new musical themes, showing the great compositional skill of the creator. It brings us through various emotions of tension, fear, and nervous joy. There are melodies that sound like they should be happy, if it weren't for the chilling background of other instruments. At times the drums race ahead, pulling the song along at full speed with them, only for everything to break off and fall back on those same mournful strings.

The two melodies from the beginning of the song return again towards the end of the song, seemingly like a verse and chorus. Oddly enough, they haven't been developed at all, and simply repeat to fade. Nonetheless, this piece is a true masterpiece of the dungeon synth genre that takes you on an emotional journey through the rapidly changing musical soundscape!

04. Darkened In Caverns Deep

This is without a doubt the most chilling piece in the whole demo. Eerie bells, strings and a haunting choir lead us in to the song. But however creepy the intro is, it seems to lead up to a climax, and then just stops. Cuts straight off. Much like on the Grim demo, one might very easily perceive this as the start of a new song. Although that may just be my perception…

After the intro, the rest of the song has a slow and surprisingly clear drum beat to it. The drumbeat doesn't change, although it is always noticeable, instead allowing the strings and other instruments above it to provide the musical variation. There is some harmony here, although the parts that harmonize are very far apart (at least an octave or so) and so this makes it hard to truly appreciate them.

The creepy strings and drumbeat lead us in to a slower section. The melody still plays on the strings, though we have whispered vocals telling us some kind of dire message. The vocals add a lot to the creepy atmosphere. This song, as well as the one preceding it, stand in sharp contrast to the happier, carefree melodies of the first two tracks on the demo. Its length is also of note, the whole piece chiming in at just under twelve minutes.

One of the only flaws I notice in this song is that at times the drums sound like a broken record rather than an organic drumbeat, and especially when the melody includes repeating notes, it makes me wonder whether or not something has gone wrong.

But on the whole, this is a brilliant, creepy song. The choir and the gong sounds in the background keep tensions high throughout. This song certainly lives up to its ominous title!

05. Outro (Battle of Bavellir)

Bombastic. That's what this song is. It sounds very much like a slightly more distorted version of the keyboard sounds from a symphonic metal track rather than dungeon synth. I could easily imagine roaring guitars, racing drums and operatic vocals soaring over this. Indeed, later on in the piece, the drums do pick up the pace a bit.

A variety of instruments come in throughout this song, adding their own flairs, their own melodies and variations. There's some interesting thunderclaps the creator uses as percussion. But these do not end this dramatic outro. Rather, the last notes simply don't return, and the music trails off.

Final Thoughts :

I was quite impressed with this album. The first songs are very immersing, and work amazingly well on their own. It's not background music, it's not something you forget about. This is full-on stuff! The songs are very cleverly written, with amazing compositional flair. Although the fourth track is too long (and there's a remake of it left in as a bonus track, though I felt it might be a bit disingenuous to review it), it by no means cheapens the demo in any way. I happily give this release four and a half out of five, and would thoroughly recommend it to our readers.

-Levi Talvi

Movie Soundtrack : An Emotional Gate Between Movie and Viewer

Who has never sung the main theme of The Lord of The Rings during his diffusion? Who has never felt the pressure and the suspense while listening to music in a horror movie?

Movie soundtracks are the characters feelings expression. They reflect the general atmosphere of a situation.

I decided to write this article because I found that the concordance between dungeon synth and movie soundtracks is enough flagrant. In parallel of Drøm, I compose also movie soundtracks. Ambient music and dungeon synth are music made especially for an atmosphere, an ambiance, a thought, a situation, or for a story. Movie soundtracks have the same objectives. Remember the basic principle of this composition style : a movie soundtrack have to dress the image and not the reverse.

Movie soundtrack is generally composed for an orchestra (except electronic sounds). Violins, brass, choirs, pianos, flutes, and others orchestral instruments are in the spotlight.

We can already note few famous and great movie soundtracks composers, like : Hans Zimmer (Rain Man, Inception, Man Of Steel, The Lion King, King Arthur, Pirates of the Caribbean, Gladiator etc ..), Howard Shore (The Lord of The Rings…), James Newton Howard (The Village ..) John Williams (Star Wars …) and many others.

But we are not them, and we have not their stuff. However, find ideas for music soundtracks and begin a draft is totally realizable.

Factors of movie soundtrack composition

Movie soundtrack is a music made to go with the viewer, make the emotional gateway between the film and the viewer. It's why to compose this kind of music, it's essential to analyze the scene where we want to add a music. Analyze the scenery (medieval, modern, fantasy, historical ..), characters, words and expressions (anger, melancholy, love, hate, sadness, joy, etc ..), the scene general atmosphere (fight, chase, relaxation, key scene, comedy, magic, revelation etc ..) and finally, the place of the scene in the movie (exposition, trigger, adventures, end etc ..). With all those factors, you will already have an idea of what music adding in the scene.

A study of a scene and the music associated : The Lord of The Rings : The Fellowship of The Ring – Finding in Rivendell (1:26:19 at 1:29:43)

How a same theme can emit a different atmosphere?

Take a classical example that all dungeon synth, fantastic movies and ambient music lovers know, The Lord of The Rings, and particularly the arrival of Frodon at Rivendell. To analyze that, we need to concentrate us to the Shire theme.

Like all the trilogy lovers know, the Shire theme appears for the first time in the first episode, when Gandalf arrive to Hobbiton, the famous place where leave the hobbits.

1) "Concerning Hobbits" A cult theme

Concentrate us to the theme. This last one is called "Concerning Hobbits". Nobody have to know solfege to guess that this theme is in a happy, friendly, innocent, welcoming mood. The Shire theme introduces very well the general atmosphere reigning since many years in the Shire. The theme is played by a flute (accompanied by the orchestra of course). Why a flute? Simply because the sound almost innocent and welcoming of this instrument, mixed with the played melody establishes a particular atmosphere. An atmosphere where there is not problems, an atmosphere where the peace, the harmony, tranquility, friendship, party are the key-words of this place. But we find this same theme played differently inside the movie, especially in the Frodo revival at Rivendell, after being stabbed by a Morgul blade. We will try to know why and find a conclusion.

2) Rivendell finding

Indeed, when Frodo wake up, he is in Rivendell, the elven city in the mountains. First, he sees Sam again, with joy. It's at this moment that the music begins. It not begins by the Shire theme, but by a sweet and weak chords succession which suggests that Frodo see Sam like liberation, like a weight removed. The melody, although a tad mysterious, inspires the lightness of the situation. So this track takes an epic, mystic and grandiose trend, with the choirs apparition and more pronounced notes.

Next, Frodo see Pippin and Merry again, this same music continues. We can fell all the finding joy between the protagonists. But the peak of emotion of this scene feels at the Frodo look when he glimpses Bilbo.

It's thanks to this look that the transition is made between the previous track and the repeat of the Shire theme. This repeat is not played by a flute in this case, because the objective of this repeat is not the joy, but the finding, the Shire nostalgia implied by Frodo and Bilbo. This theme returns to recall the Shire, especially when Frodo opens the famous Bilbo book. The nostalgia, the memories are now the key-words of this theme, which served at the beginning to describe a happy atmosphere.

Conclusion:

A same theme played differently by orchestra or by different instruments changes literally the track atmosphere and emotions released according to the desire scene. If you want to begin a movie soundtrack, don't forget to keep all your themes, melodies or music, few of them can be useful to emit a particular emotion.

Few tips :

- *Don't forget that to compose a movie soundtrack adequate to the scene, you have to feel the scene, understand it in every corner, and consider the necessary factors to the composition (read the "Factors of movie soundtrack composition").*

- *Know how an orchestra is composing and choose the right instruments (see the analyse) according to the scene atmosphere.*

- *Give significance to a theme or an ambiance at specific times. Target the key moments of a scene before to begin the music composition.*

- *If it's possible, read the movie script before composing, it will serve to know the story and not being lost for the composition.*

For the stuff, you can do it provided you composition software like Sibelius, Finale or Guitar Pro (less access to an orchestra but as great as the other). For good orchestral sounds, unfortunately, this is a little bit expensive, but VST like EastWest Symphonic Orchestra or also Symphobia are very very good. But before looking for the sound, the composition is the most essential thing for a movie soundtrack.

I hope that this little article will tell you more about movie soundtrack! See you soon with Drøm and maybe other things!

-Alex Lamia

Review of "La Lune Noir"

"La Lune Noir" was an LP released in 1996 by the Finnish dark ambient band Valor. The creator, Tommi Rantanen, has also been in several metal projects in the past, and is still in a metal band called Impious Havoc today. Since I don't know all that much about the artist or the band, let's just get on with looking at this LP.

01. Valorian Twilight

This is, without a doubt, one of the scariest pieces in the dark ambient genre I have ever heard. It starts off calmly enough, with a synth that sounds almost identical to the synth used on the album "Filosofem" by Burzum. This synth plays an ominous, but not so scary riff along to a steady, marching drum beat.

Then, with only a shrill bell as warning, we launch into the most chilling section I have ever heard. Ramanen selected the creepiest children's choir out there to sing something that sounds a bit like a nursery rhyme (there's something about little children singing that makes them universally haunting). All this while, a very deep bass note is held, while that Filosofem synth plays the same riff as before. Each time, a grim bell tolls to announce a repeat of the children's nursery dirge.

However, although this first section of the song is brilliant, the remainder is not all that interesting. A different choir provides some melodic variation by playing another melody beneath the main riff played ceaselessly by that Filosofem synth. And all the while the same drums persist, beating with the same rhythm so often it at times feels like a heartbeat.

The piece ends on this same, uninteresting note, though without the slightly-less-creepy choir. A grinding synth (that really sounds like it would be much better suited to industrial music) playing a very low note leads the drumbeat and the Filosofem-synth riff to its unpronounced end.

02. Enigmatic Hearts

The Filosofem synth features here again, in the intro to "Enigmatic Hearts". It plays an ominous, repetitive riff, accompanied this time by low-register strings.

This song is not as dull as its predecessor, however. It has a great deal more atmosphere, with a howling wind sound in the background aiding the listener in conjuring a mental image of fantasy lands. The haunting bell and deep strings still remind us of the dark dimensions of this song, and the demo.

Another point of note is that this song appears to have more variation than the first (perhaps we should think of it as an intro?). Although there is a long section in the middle, that uses the same synth riff from the intro, just a lot softer. This section is accompanied by a slow drumbeat.

This drumbeat helps lead us on into the final section of this song. The final section is very slow. In many ways it is uninteresting, though if one is feeling particularly meditative this might serve well as background music with its slow strings and drums. To be fair, it does introduce another instrument briefly, but then it returns to that same minimalist dirge.

Like the last one, the piece ends on an unsatisfactory note, with the same drum rhythm that we've heard throughout the whole song played for one more bar. This song and the one before it were hindered greatly by the kind of repetitive minimalism reminiscent of early ambient Burzum works. There's a line between minimalism and repetition that dungeon synth and ambient artists must tread carefully. It can be very tempting to be lazy with your songwriting and call it minimalism – but we can well. And this song crossed that line long ago!

03. Neverseen Depths and Dungeons

This piece, in spite of its alluringly fantastic title, starts off HORRIBLY. All the intro is (I repeat, this is ALL there is to it) is one note played by a synth, FOR OVER A MINUTE.

First of all, any intro that takes a minute has a degree of risk to it. Of course, some artists do it very well. Not here! Not only is that note held for an age with nothing, not even a drumbeat, to accompany it, but that one note has the most horrible vibrato I've ever heard. It either sounds like the composer is just pressing the note over and over again (which I can tell he isn't) or

like the whole song is stuck. It honestly sounds like a broken record. Gave me VERY bad expectations for the rest of the song (and I hadn't been too thrilled before, either).

Much to my discontent, that one note is STILL held on in the background. After a minute or so, however, we FINALLY get some variation. Some other strings play a slow melody on top of it, weaving between a percussive melody played by a synth that reminds me a lot of the synth used on "Ansuzgardaraiwo" on Burzum's second ambient album, "Hlidskjálf".

And while other instruments do come in throughout the piece to have their say, this piece is overall infuriating. That SAME one note is held throughout the whole thing, there is little real melody to speak of, except the one beaten out by that Ansuzgardaraiwo-like synth. The creator makes some attempt at ambience here, but all that is totally overshadowed by the mind-numbing boringness of this piece.

If he had intended it to be ambient, he made a horrible choice of instrumentation. He should have chosen far better synth sounds for this song, ones that can be repeated on end without making the listener sick!

04. The Chaining of the Messenger

What strikes the listener immediately about this piece is that the synth sounds are way too artificial. They sound very electronic. As before, many of them would be better put to use on industrial tracks rather than dark ambient ones.

And while the intro is slow, with over a minute of the same riff (though thankfully it was not a single note again!), this piece does redeem itself slightly. A weird, mechanical crunching sound comes in. It all sounds very much like the gears of a machine turning. This nice break, however, is made redundant by the return of that same repetitive riff from before.

After a new section with barely noticeable variation on the original theme, that same mechanical crunching/clicking noise returns to finish it off. I don't see how anything in this song had relation to the title. The music didn't help me picture anything, and didn't make me feel anything but annoyed.

05. Stones That Wept

Now that I'd suffered through the brutal torture of the first four tracks, this song had a lot of onus on it to really prove its metal. And, of course, it didn't.

While I did find this piece almost enjoyable, especially compared to the rest of this LP, it wasn't enough to redeem the release as a whole. The synths used were significantly better, and they did a lot more to create a sense of ambience. However, Rantanen repeats the same riff over and over again here. The only instruments are the Ansuzgardaraiwo-like synth (which I now think is probably modified timpani), a bell and those same strings from before.

One positive thing about this song, that added a LOT of ambience to it, was the screams laced over it. They didn't have enough presence that they distracted ones attention, rather they stayed in the background, giving this otherwise pure fantasy-sounding piece a chilling nuance.

Despite all this, it is still a boringly repetitive, "minimalist" song. As background music, though, it might be tolerable.

06. Sorrow Walks The Forest Path

Seemingly an improvement on "Stones That Wept", the last track of this LP is very melodic. And while the melodies aren't so good that they stick in your head, they're not bad. The instrumentation used is good, and very appropriate.

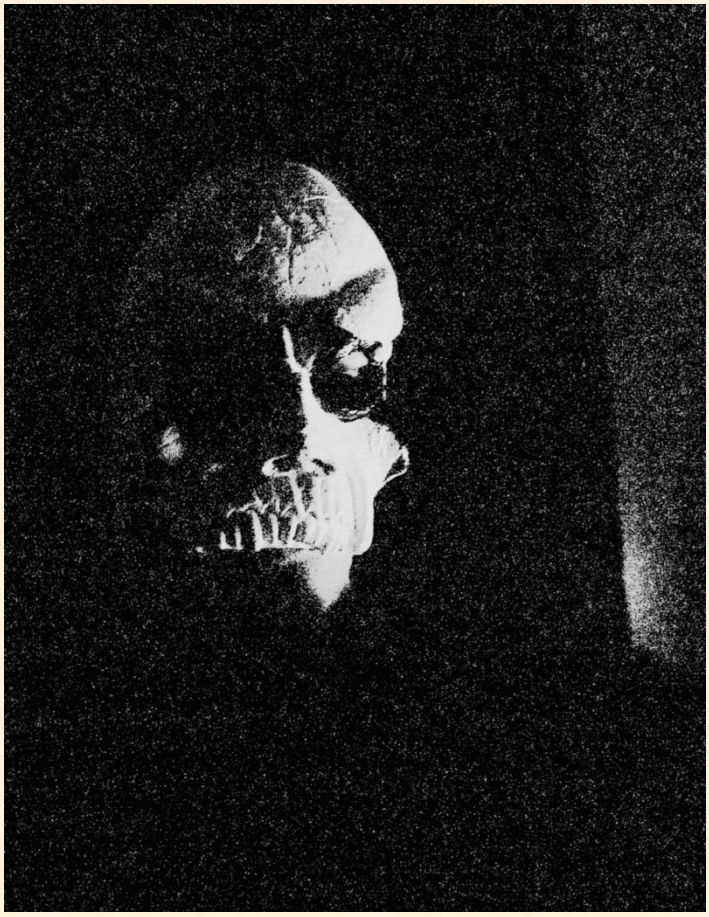
There's a nice bit of chromaticism sprinkled throughout this piece. In the middle there's also a very haunting section with one creepy bell that later gives way to a ghostly synth. It conjures up images of ghost children, and reminds me a lot of Coraline. This song takes all the best aspects of "Valorian Twilight" and boils them all down into one, finally decent, song.

Nevertheless, it is not enough to totally redeem this LP. With horrible repetition, at times dreadful choices of synth sounds, and piss-poor composition on the whole, this LP gets one out of five!

-Levi Talvi

Interview with Erang

Dungeons of Darkness interviews the creator of the phenomenal dungeon synth act Erang.



Interview with Erang, part 1

Levi –

Tell me a little about yourself, your musical history and the history of the band.

Erang –

Well, I dont want to reveal details about myself as I hope that my music speaks for itself.

About my musical history, I use to play a little bit of guitar when I was around 10 or 11 years old but nothing great: I just know a few chords. I'm a self-taught and I've never played in a band, always been a one man band.

Erang started in the spring of 2012.

Levi –

Do you, or would you ever consider working with others or doing Erang live?

Erang –

No. Erang will always stay a one man band and I will never play live.

By the way, I dont know if there is any people who would like to hear live dungeon synth, it sounds strange... However, I'm not against doing a split or collaborate on covers with others artists (as we did with Lord Lovidicus on Youtube).

Levi –

I've noticed your work is considerably higher-quality recording than most in the dungeon synth genre. Do you attain this through MIDI or something else?

Interview with Erang, part 2

Erang –

It is a bit funny to hear that my music have a "high quality sound" regarding my way of working, mixing and mastering.

Maybe some of my songs have a clearer sound than some others dungeon synth musics but I also got some pretty low-fi tracks so I really don't know... In fact, it depends on my feeling about the mood of the song: if it needs to be muddy and raw I go low-fi but if it needs to be a bit lighter and clear, I try to get a nicer sound. However, I always try to spend the less possible time in mixing, equalisation and all that stuff. What matters to me is the melody, the feeling, the mood, etc. And to answer the last part of your question : no, I don't use midi.

Levi –

Are you signed to a label, or do you release your music independently?

What are the pros/cons of the method you currently use?

Erang –

Yes, I'm on katabaz records (http://katabazrecords.bandcamp.com). It is a small netlabel (only long time friends are on it). The only cons is that it is hard to share and promote your music because you are lonely and unknown. So any initiative like yours with your magazine is very welcomed and really appreciate ! One thing that is really precious to me is when people who like my music help me by talking about it on facebook or youtube, etc. I really thank them for that ! But the pros of not being on a big label or not earning my life with my music is simple : I'm totally free. Nobody tells me what to do or when to do it. Fuck off marketing or sales strategies... My music is my escapism from everyday life so I try to avoid as much as possible any kind of rules (even if there are still some)

Levi –

What inspires Erang? And what inspired Erang in the past?

Erang –

I was (and I am still) inspired by nostalgia and childhood feelings : walks in fresh forests when I was a child, music from old video games, tv shows or old movies from the 80's / 90's, places where I use to go and love but that dont exist anymore, same with people, stories of Tolkien that my father used to tell me to make me sleep when I was a child, etc. ... Time destroys everything : Erang talks about what is lost for ever...

Levi –

Tell us about your recording process. Do you record your music at home or in a studio? What gear do you use to record and more importantly, what software do you use to record?

Erang –

Sorry but I dont like to get into technical details because I think it kills a bit the "magic". You can make Dungeon Synth with pretty much any instrument or piece of software and nowadays, with Internet, it is really not that hard to find everything you need. Dungeon Synth, to me, is not about the tool you use. It's all about atmosphere... But just to give you a short answer : pretty much everything I use is old or outdated. I dont care about the tool I use : if I like what I get with it, I use it.

Levi –

Where are you looking to take Erang in the next couple of years

Erang –

I dont have any plans : Erang is not my job, it is my passion. I will go where my instinct and feelings will take me... and if one day I think I've got nothing more to say with Erang, I'll stop it.

Levi –

Where and when is it best to listen to Erang? Do you hope your audience listens to your music in certain conditions, or in a certain frame of mind ?

Erang –

I hope that my music will take the listener in a unique journey, far from here... I hope that it will allow him to get into another realm... To escape the everyday life...

Levi –

What is your opinion on fantasy roleplaying games, both tabletop ones like Dungeons and Dragons, and computer games like the Elder Scrolls series? Do you play any of these, and if so have they influenced your music?

Erang –

I use to play to fantasy roleplaying on my first computers in the 90's and on SNES. I also use to play a little bit tabletops when I was a teen (Stormbringer, MERP (Middle Earth Role Playing),etc.). I deeply love the imagery and the power of imagination around these kind of games even if I don't play anymore and never been an hardcore gamer : I understand and feel connected with people who like them.

Levi –

Where can our readers and your fans find your music?

Erang –

http://erang.bandcamp.com

Thanks for supporting independent musicians!

Levi –

Do you have anything you would like to say to your fans?

Erang –

I dont think that I have "fans" but I guess "Thank you!" could resume it even if it wouldnt be enough ! Everytime I read a positive comment (on youtube, facebook, etc.) or receive some nice emails it really makes my day. Knowing that someone, somewhere, is enjoying my musical world and what I try to create is one of the best feeling on earth. So to all of you who listen to Erang : I hope you enjoy the journey ! Thank you, really !

Review of "Sorrowful Sounds of Emptiness"

"Sorrowful Sounds of Emptiness" is the third release from the Canadian black metal/dungeon synth band, Warground. I will say briefly that I loved his black metal music, and am filled with promise and anticipation for the first ambient release. This, as well as his black metal, was all made by Randal Thorson.

Warground is signed to Depressive Illusions Records, and makes very limited numbers of copies of their music.

And now that all the background's done with, let's look at the songs. They aren't in order, so I won't put numbers on them – please bear in mind the order I review them may not be the order in which they're supposed to be listened to.

A Land Taken By The Nothing

This is a very gentle, meditative song, with a lot of bass in it. It is simple music, and I can imagine it would be easy to meditate to or to fall asleep to. It's clear as day that this is intended as background music, and is not meant to take the centre stage by any stretch of the imagination.

However, this isn't necessarily a positive thing, and lends itself to mediocracy. After a while, the music itself just becomes white noise with a slight flavor to it.

Imagine, if you will, eating a slab of toffee, but with no flavor. It's utterly gray (like the album art, funnily enough), and completely tasteless. While you're eating it you may notice the texture at first, but because nothing about it grabs you, it'd probably be quite boring to eat. And once you'd eaten it, you probably wouldn't remember it very well.

And that's the problem with this song. It's nice enough, with beautiful low strings and a piddling little harp sound that bounces over it unobtrusively. But it's not remarkable…

Broken

This piece fails to take off where "A Land Taken By The Nothing" left off. It's another strings-dominated song, though this time accompanied by an echoey choir as well. Unfortunately it suffers all the same pitfalls as the other songs on this release – it's great background music, but has a lack of interest in it that lends itself quickly to white noise. It just doesn't have enough defined movement to keep the listener interested, and in all honesty the song has the exact same sound throughout, so it's hard to comment on anything here.

The Darkened Path of Sadness

Although at first the harp lines sound somewhat more listenable, this song doesn't improve much in terms of interest as the other two.

Even if you're judging it as background music, I don't think this is the greatest release ever, namely because it hasn't really expressed any variety of moods. It's all been this kind of dreamy, floaty strings music that doesn't seem to go anywhere and doesn't grab anyone's interest. The lack of attention-grabbing awesomeness would be fine if the music didn't always take us on this monotone trip.

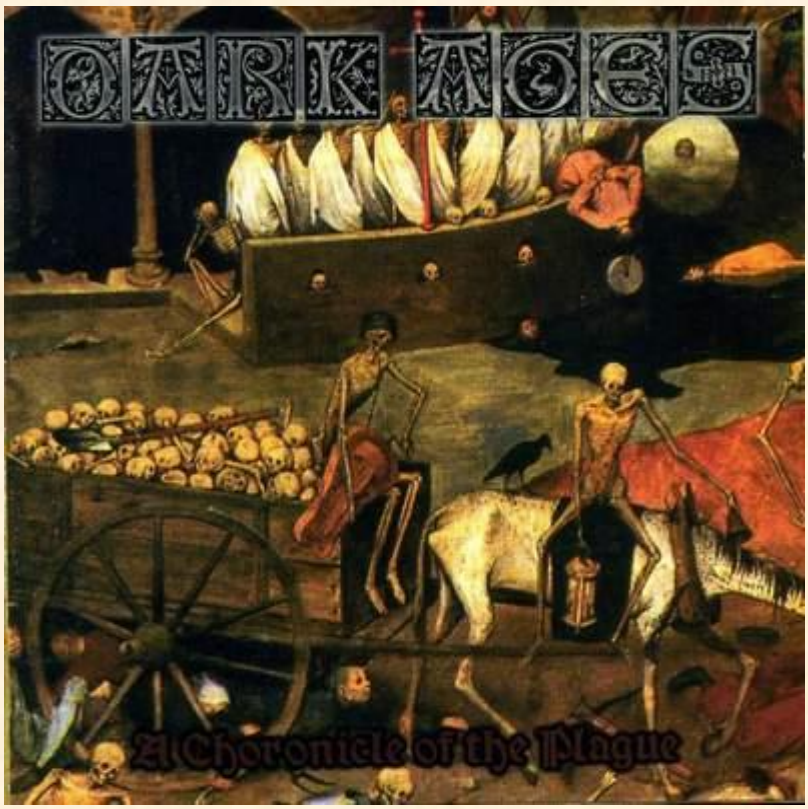
Final thoughts -

This is not a particularly great release. It's boring, monochrome and slow. While at first it might create some sense of mood, that mood is either wilted away by the sheer boredom of the music or overlooked due to the fact that this album has absolutely no changes in it whatsoever. Dull, boring, not at all worth listening to. I give this album one out of five.

-Levi Talvi

Review of "A Chronicle Of The Plague"

The last review of this month's issue is an album by a Ukranian band that I particularly love. "A Chronicle of the Plague" was released by the band Dark Ages in 2006. It's an album with a strong Medieval theme. Even the cover art is drawn in the Medieval style, and depicts some skeletons in white robes (perhaps ascending into heaven) while two skeletons ride a sickly donkey bearing along a cart full of skulls. I think the fact that the drivers are skeletons also is meant to show that no-one was truly safe from the plague.



Now, let's get on with talking about the music!

01. Ships Full of Blackened Corpses

A great, ominous start to the album. There's a long-held drone in the background, with bells marking out a chilling melody above it. This reminds one of the darkest aspects of the Medieval age – the tension and drama of it all just reeks of death.

This song tells of ominous things to come.

The bells and strings suddenly break (pretty much seamlessly, though with a lot of significance attached) to a choir and organ playing. The choir is fairly realistic, and the harmonies they make, especially with the organ, are rich and interesting. Even though the melody is slow moving, this song still grabs the listeners interest.

With a thud, the church bells and strings return. The organ holds one note mournfully, desperately clinging on to memories of those happier times.

After a brief and stoic reminder of the darkness in this piece, the choir and organ return. This chorus invokes images in my head of flagellants praying for mercy to their god. It conjures images of priests and bishops having haunting visions the deadly future. It's just a wonderful experience!

02. Rats

The music then returns with a shocking, percussive synth. This synth is just like the kind of instrument they play when they want to shock you in the scariest part of a horror movie. With vastly contrasted dynamics and an eerie strings melody being played behind it, this part of the song hones in the fear that should be inspired by the coming plague ships.

Later on in this section, and nearer the end of the song, we hear some other faint synth in the background. It sounds percussive in some ways, but also almost human. Could it be the moans of plague victims? We don't know…

This brilliant first song ends on a less-than-dramatic note, with the strings simply fading away. But this is only a prelude of the havoc to come!

03. Blessed Be The Waters Of The Avignon River

Appropriately dark, this piece starts off with a combination of shrill violins (to mimic rats squeaking, perhaps) and lower-register cellos and what appears to be some woodwind instruments, playing an ominous dirge.

The melody is taken through several instruments. It passes through theses strings to a choir, with some kind of glockenspiel tapping out a chilling memory over it.

This song (and the album in general) is brilliant at bringing out pitch contrasts. There's a mixture of the extremely high and the extremely low in most songs. It creates a confusing sensation that's brilliantly conducive to atmosphere.

The piece ends with the initial melody having morphed into something new, though it ends with the same nonchalant grace that its predecessor finished on.

04. The Doors With Scarlet Crosses

Bells, and those contrasting strings mark out a less-than-sanctimonious start to this song.

Although it is very repetitive, with a drone note held underneath it throughout the whole thing, and the melody changing very little, I still find myself interested in and inspired by this piece. For some reason it makes me think of ghosts on the water (does the cover art of Burzum's first album ring any bells here?) trailing along the paths of the city they once walked.

By the end of this haunting piece, the melody had morphed again, just like it did in "Rats", and again it ends relatively quietly. Perhaps this is done by the creator as a means to move the listener on seamlessly between songs, like telling a story.

05. Black Death

Now, the doors with scarlet crosses were always one thing that sparked my imagination as a child that loved learning about Medieval history. I'd imagine the lives of those trapped inside the plague houses, of people starving and wasting away inside, of them pawing and scratching at blocked-up windows.

And this song brings back all of those fantasies in a flood. It is brilliantly haunting. The bell melodies, while repetitive, do somehow shift into a new form by the end of the piece, and the piece itself is still fascinating. Though I must say I was not too thrilled with the intro, this piece certainly wasn't marred too much by it.

While this song (and the album in general) functions perfectly well as music to listen to on its own, it would be even greater as background music – a truly phenomenal journey into the middle ages.

06. Dead Desolate Villages

In accordance with its title, this track starts off on a very low note (literally!) with a lot of crackling. It has an almost distorted sound quality. While it has good atmosphere, I must confess I wasn't too satisfied with this piece. Mainly because the notes are in too low a register, it's impossible to follow the melody. And especially with the almost low-fi recording of the synths, it all becomes white noise fairly quickly. And that's not good music.

07. Dreams In Yellow

This piece is all played on strings (and a choir that meshes in somewhere). While this causes it to lack attack it makes up for it in ambience. And this piece manages not to sound boring and slow like many other pieces of similar composition. It does have moving melodies that are nice to listen to.

While the atmosphere in the piece isn't exactly happy, it's certainly not as foreboding or as somber as the rest of the songs on this album are. It's rather quiet, calm and still (but not in a bad way). It is without a doubt a very dream-like piece.

A kind of calm after the storm, this song leads the listener on through a dreamscape. There's no scuttling of rats, no high-pitched wailing of violins, no baleful lamentations of a church choir. Just quietude and the drifting melodies of dreams.

Final Thoughts –

"A Chronicle Of The Plague" is an excellent album, both for listening to on its own and as background music. It has a markedly Medieval tone to it, fabulous songwriting and manages to tell vivid stories through music. I'd gladly give this album four out of five and would happily recommend it to any of our readers.

-Levi Talvi

Credits And Contacts

Thank you so much for reading Dungeons of Darkness! If you want to know when the next release is coming, or if you want to learn more about the genre or contact the magazine creator, you'll find out all of that below.

But first we're just going to make clear who did what, and give out some special thanks.

Credits to Alex Lamia for his excellent article "Movie Soundtrack : An Emotional Gate Between Movie And Viewer", and for his interview for his band "Drom".

Dungeons of Darkness do not own the rights to any of the images used in this magazine or the cover, though we have tried to seek permission from their owners wherever possible. If your album art or photo was used on the cover and you wish it to be removed, please contact the editor immediately and it will be taken down.

And now for some gratitude!

Special thanks to the Dungeon Synth blog, and the Asmodian Coven blog for providing not only a lot of the information, but also the music I used for the reviews in this magazine.

Thanks also to everyone I interviewed in the magazine. I wish you all the best of luck with music-making in the future!

Contact!

As you may have guessed by now, the only other guy behind this, the person who did the editing, most of the writing, putting it all together, etc, is me, Levi Talvi. If you have any questions about the magazine, or just want to send me little trinkets to show me how awesome I am, you're more than welcome to email me, write me or send me mail.

***Note : if you're reading this online and want to buy a physical copy of the magazine** ; I do not yet know the prices. All I will charge you for is shipping and printing costs. If you wish to get a physical copy, please mail me a SASE (self-addressed-stamped-envelope) large enough to hold this magazine (it's an A4, there are envelopes designed for that) to the same contact address posted below. Anyone wishing to order a hard copy should please email me beforehand so I can tell you how much printing money to include with the SASE.*

Email Address : xxxxxxx@hotmail.com

Mobile Number : 07xxx xxxxxx

Address :

xxxxxxx,
London, England

Lastly, I would like to thank all you Dungeons of Darkness readers for your interest in the genre and for supporting us with our first issue! Stay tuned for issue two, coming next month!

Yours with pride,

-Levi Talvi