

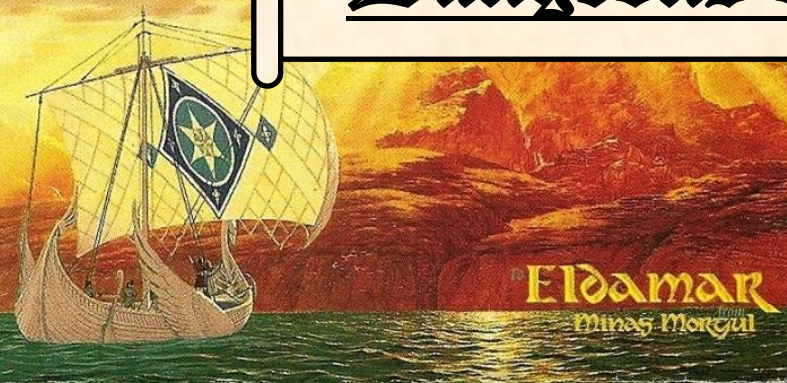


ELFEIN

EVEN
WITCH
CRAFT
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Dungeons of Darkness

ELFEIN



Eldamar

Minas Morgul

The House of the Trolls

Bonus Demo '97

MIRKWOOD
LOTHLÓRIEN
MINAS MORCUL
ISENCARÓ
MORIA
URUK-HAI

LOTHLÓRIEN
MORIA
ISENCARÓ
MINAS MORCUL

Created in Winter '97.
All music & lyrics by Cerunnos

«Mirkwood» and «Uruk-hai» created in Summer '98.
Recorded and mixed at Utumno during Winter '99. Remixed in Spring '99



The Bards Tale



Another World
Another Time



Capitulatio de partibus Saxoniar



Kyndill og Steinn

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Editorials

Welcome, one and all, to issue #2 of Dungeons of Darkness.

If you're a returning reader, I cannot thank you enough. Your support for this magazine has been monumental.

If you're a new reader, welcome!

But you might need a little intro.

This is a magazine dedicated to dungeon synth, and all related genres (dark ambient, dark medieval, neo-classical, etc...). We'll do reviews and interviews of dungeon synth bands wherever we can find them. We'll also have general articles – articles about fantasy related stuff, and quite a few articles about making your own music and getting it out there.

As with issue #1, this will be a webzine, though if you wish to purchase a physical copy, all you need to do is send a S.A.S.C (self-addressed stamped envelope) to the address given to you on the "Credits and Contacts" page, large enough to contain an A4 magazine, with £5-10 in it to pay for printing costs. This is just about enough to cover printing costs, I am not running this magazine to make profit.

As always, if you have any further questions (this will be given to you on the contacts page also), you may email me at :

Gynophagiaband@hotmail.com

In closing, I need YOU, the Dungeons of Darkness reader, to help me out.

I need you to spread this magazine as far as you can. Share it to friends, family, and co-workers! You can even like our Facebook page now :

<https://www.facebook.com/dungeonsofdarknesszine>

Dungeon synth is going to take over. And it starts here!

-Levi Talvi

Interview with Swordmaiden

Dungeons of Darkness is thrilled to review Clarissa for her amazing ambient project, Swordmaiden.

Levi :

Could you tell us a little about you, your musical history, and the history of your band?

Clarissa :

I have always had a passion for nature, paganism and Scottish history. I started medieval swordfighting from a young age and found my passion for medieval re-enacting and fighting. In a way the project grew from this passion. I began playing drums when I was 13 and experimented with some guitar and piano. I always liked to improvise and compose. It was a cathartic outlet. I played drums in a few metal bands, and wrote my own music on the side. I started experimenting with the keyboard and began recording symphonic music. I was ambitious to create dark atmospheric sounds which would convey certain emotions. The pagan theme is in honour of my Scottish and Pictish ancestors.

Levi :

What are your influences and inspirations for Swordmaiden?

Clarissa :

The main inspiration is nature, the past; including paganism, celtic and pictish history. The main musical influences are summoning, Bathory, Howard Shore, and Hans Zimmer.

Levi :

Will you ever do shows? And are you looking to promote?

Clarissa :

Since this is mainly a recording project I am not looking to do shows. However, that may change in the future depending on how the project grows.

Levi :

Is there a story behind Swordmaiden? A particular historical figure, perhaps?

Clarissa :

My Scottish, Celtic and Pictish ancestors are a major influence including various historical figures. 'Northern Blood, Highland Freedom' was inspired by Robert the Bruce and the Battle of Culloden.

Pagan history is also an influence, as I think of the Pictish pagans depicting a culture who are more respectful to nature, less sexist and oppressive; in being free from Christian rule. 'Swordmaiden' represents this idea of freedom I feel we have lost in the modern world. The pagan warrior theme is also a metaphor representing the conjuring of strength that we have within us. In dark situations or 'out on the battlefield' it is looking within to carry on and keep fighting.

Levi :

Do you/would you ever collaborate with other artists?

Clarissa :

Although I write everything myself, I am looking to work with others too. My classically trained brother did guest vocal for 'Northern Blood, Highland Freedom'. Also, I am currently working with the guitarist from my past black metal band on a new song called 'Long lost emerald'.

Levi :

What gear and recording software do you use?

Clarissa :

I use Cubase primarily with vsts such as EWQL, along with a Yamaha keyboard, and a Mapex Meridian Drumkit including Zildjian ZXC cymbals.

Levi :

What do you plan to do with Swordmaiden in the future?

Clarissa :

I plan on releasing an album called Frostbitten and Battlescarred. I am still experimenting and writing a few new songs. I hope the album will be finished by December

Levi :

Where can our readers find your music? Any last words?

Clarissa :

You can find the music on my lastfm page or myspace where there are songs free to download. You will also find them by searching 'Swordmaiden' on Youtube, or Facebook. Keep updated with my next releases!

Recording At Home

2 – Learning to Play

Now, the more resourceful readers will have taken heed of last month's issue and will hopefully have cobbled together a small studio or some audio recording gear in their home.

This, the second part of the Recording At Home series, is going to try and teach you how to play.

I know where I'm coming from, and I believe I can speak with authority about learning to play, because I was in that same position not too long ago. I have been playing all my instruments less than three years. And as far as dungeon synth instrumentation goes, I've only been learning the keyboard for about two years now.

*And in a nutshell, here's what you've got to remember. It's a **VERY** steep learning curve at first, and it seems insurmountable. But you will get over the top in time.*

I'm going to make this article more specifically about learning piano/keyboards, because that's the instrument of dungeon synth. Nevertheless, what I'm saying in the article should apply to most other instruments as well.

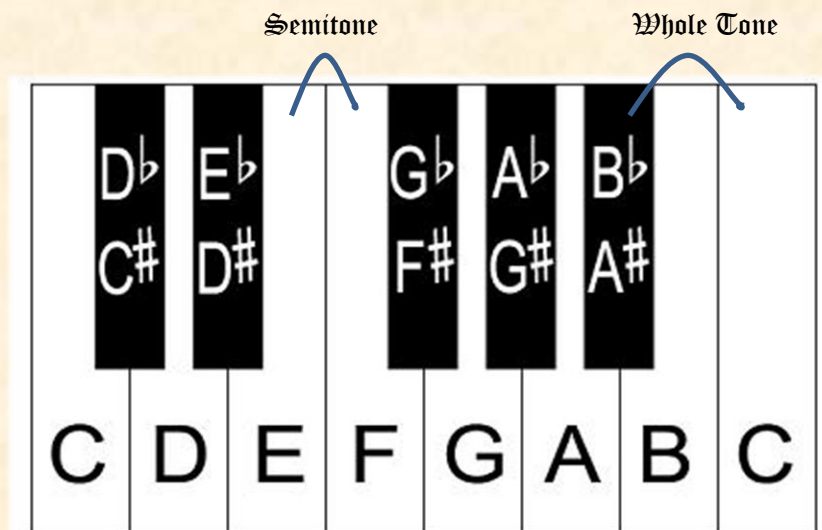
***WARNING** – coming into this you will need **A LOT** of dedication. How fast you learn, is entirely up to you. If you want to skyrocket, you have to skyrocket. If you want to crawl along at a snail's pace, that's also your prerogative.*

Things To Start Off With –

1) Learning the notes

Every note in music has a letter associated to it. These letters go from A to G. It's very helpful to find a piano roll on the internet that has the notes written on it, and then write them on your own piano. This way, even just by looking at it, you can learn the notes.

Notes are divided into whole tones and semitones. This sounds stressful, but hold on to your horses. It's really not that scary. A semitone represents one distinct note. When we use the words "whole tone" and "semi tone" all we're really talking about is intervals (the gaps between notes). The interval of a whole tone is twice that of a semitone. Every key on a piano represents a semitone. So, an interval of a whole tone will jump over one key and hit the key just next to it. An interval of a semitone will not jump over any keys and will simply hit the key right next to it.



Notes can have further classification by being “sharp” (shown on sheet music by an “#” written next to the note) or “flat” (shown on sheet music by a “b” written next to the note). You’ll often have heard this about singers. If a singer is crap and singing lower than they’re supposed to, we often say they’re singing “flat”. That’s all it means. A “flat” note, is simply a note moved one semitone down. Conversely, a sharp is one semitone flat.

It’s very common for beginners to think that all black notes are sharps or flats. That’s not at all true. Although the diagram above doesn’t say that any white notes are flat (just a convention), every note is a sharp and flat of something. If you want to know what they are, we’ll use an example.

Look at C on the piano sheet on the last page. C is F flat (Fb), because it is one semitone below F.

Now look at C on the piano sheet. C is B sharp (B#) because it is one semitone above B.

And that’s all there is to that.

I understand this will seem daunting at first, but give it time. You’ll take it in soon enough, and if you practise and look at it often enough, it becomes second nature.

2. Learning Theory and Sheet Music

Now, while this step isn’t essential, it’s very, very useful in learning to play keyboards (or any instrument, for that matter). Music theory, however complicated it sounds, simply refers to the rules that guide music. It’s the rules that say whether you tap your feet along to the rhythm three at a time, or four at a time.

Here’s a breakdown of some of the most basic theory, the rest you should really learn on your own :

Timing

Music is divided into certain time signatures. These are merely rhythms. While some get incredibly complicated, you need not fear. The only two ones you’ll come across regularly are three-four timing (written as 3/4 on sheet music) and four-four timing (written at 4/4 on sheet music).

These time signatures tell you how many beats there are in a bar. The numerator in what appears to be a fraction used to represent the time signature tells you the number of beats, while the one below helps contextualising it by telling you how many beats it is being compared to.

You **DO NOT** need to know much about this whole contextualising thing to get a grip of basic theory. All you really need to learn are those two most common timings (the vast majority of all music follows these) :

3/4 Timing

3/4 timing means that there are three beats in a bar. Often you will hear a musician “count in” the rest of the band by saying “one, two, three! One, two three!” or “one, two, three, four! One, two, three, four!”. Whether they count to three or four depends on the number of beats in the bar.

A bar is usually signalled by a slightly emphasized starting beat. It normally isn’t loud, just a slight emphasis. It comes naturally, with a certain rhythm, after a while. Bars are separated in sheet music by vertical lines as shown below.

Incidentally, we all learn these rhythms while in our mothers’ womb, listening to her heartbeat.

So, they’re endemic to all of us.

Here is what 3/4 timing looks like on sheet music ;



A good example in dungeon synth is “Die Liebe Nerpus”, on Burzum’s second ambient album, “Hlidskjalf”. The song is in 3/4 timing, but it is also a good piece to point out and show what a bar is. The left hand of the keyboard part plays a note whenever there is a new bar in that song. You’ll notice that the right hand also comes in with ever-so-slightly greater emphasis. And this, in essence, is that a bar is in music.

4/4 Timing

4/4 timing is much more common than 3/4. It's safe to assume that the majority of the songs you listen to in your day-to-day life are in this time signature. It relies on the same concept as 3/4, only instead of 3 beats every bar, there are 4.

It is written on sheet music like this ;



Note, the C with a line through it.

This doesn't refer to any actual notes or any-thing like that. It is simply another way of writing the 4/4 without putting down numbers. It means "standard time", because 4/4 is so commonly used, that if you tell someone to play in the usual time, it means 4/4.

Note values

There's one more important aspect of timing you need to get under your belts before you are ready to venture out into the big, scary world of more complicated music theory and sheet music,

Like with time signatures and bars, a lot of this should come more easily to you, especially to the musically inclined.


A note's time value is simply how long the note lasts for. Some notes are longer than others.

This is NOT to be confused with TEMPO. Tempo tells you how many beats of a song will be played within the minute.


So, a song with a tempo of 100bpm (beats per minute), will have played 100 beats by the time 1 minute has passed. The value of the notes in that piece will remain the same even if it is taken to 200bpm. The tempo of a piece does not affect the notes in it, just how fast the piece is played.

The note values only change relative to the tempo. So, a crochet (equivalent to one beat in a bar – in 4/4 timing, for example, it is one of the four beats) might take 0.6 seconds in a tempo of 100bpm, but would take 0.5 seconds in a tempo of 120bpm. The RATIO stays the same.


Here are the main values you need to know, and a little more (remember that all these notes can be drawn upside down – that changes absolutely nothing about the note, all that matters is where it is on the stave, which we'll come to later);

-The Semibreve. (Drawn like this on sheet music) 


A semibreve represents four beats. It takes 2.4 seconds in a tempo of 100bpm.

-The Minim. (Drawn like this on sheet music) 

A minim represents two beats. It takes 1.2 seconds in a tempo of 100bpm.

-The Crochet. (Drawn like this on sheet music) 

A crochet represents one beat. It takes 0.6 seconds in a tempo of 100bpm.

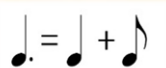
-The Quaver. (Drawn like this on sheet music) 

A quaver represents half a beat. It takes 0.3 seconds in a tempo of 100bpm.

-The Semiquaver. (Drawn like this on sheet music) 

A semiquaver represents one quarter of a beat. It takes 0.15 seconds in a tempo of 100bpm.

The only other thing you need to know about timing (for now, anyway) is the "dotted" note. A dot on the side of a note simply means you play that note 1.5x as long. So, you take half the length of that note, add that to the original length of the note, and hold it for that length of time. So, for example, to play a dotted crochet, you hold the note for the length of a crochet plus a quaver, which adds up to 0.9 seconds in a tempo of 100bpm. A "dotted" note is shown with a dot next to the note. Like this ;



-Reading Sheet Music

Unfortunately, there is no easy way for me (or anyone, really) to explain this to you – it's something you're just going to have to learn. So, let's get cracking.

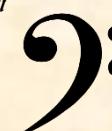
Clefs

You'll notice that there are two distinguished clefs in piano music, with a gap between them. These two are called the treble and bass clefs. Their symbols are usually shown at the start of sheet music (along with key signature that we'll get to later)

The treble clef is (usually) played by your right hand, and displays notes ABOVE Middle C (aka C4). This symbol shows you which clef is treble (though it's usually the one on top); ----->



The bass clef is (usually) played by your left hand, and displays notes BELOW Middle C (aka C4). This symbol shows you which clef is bass (though it's usually the one on the bottom); ----->



Time Signature

Time signature is shown by what looks like a fraction at the top. Like clefs, it is shown at the start of the sheet music, and is not shown again unless it changes.

Here is an example of what 4/4 time signature looks like (with the "standard time" signature which means the same thing):



Key Signature

Just before we delve into the topic of keys, I'll tell you what key signatures are. Key signatures tell you which key a piece is in. They're like a little manual telling you how to play each key. In each key, certain notes are sharpened and some are flattened. The key signature tells you which notes to flatten and which ones to sharpen to keep playing in that key.

So, for example. The key of D minor has one flat, B. Every B in a D minor piece is played flat (Bb). This is shown in the key signature, with the flattening symbol shown on the stave (line of sheet music) that corresponds to a B. You'll see how to read the lines themselves below, but for now, here's what the key signature of D minor looks like (ignore the F major for now)

Keys

No, I'm not talking about keys as in, those white/black levers you push to make a piano sound. I'm talking about what a key means in theory. Keys are based on scales. Each key has its own scale, where all the right notes are flattened or sharpened as per the key signature.

There are also two kinds of keys – major and minor.

It's very easy to think of major as being happy, and minor as being sad. But a better way is to think of minor keys and scales as just being more serious ones. Pieces played in major keys feel more like they're joking around, whereas minor pieces are usually more sincere. Some major pieces can be woefully sad, and some minor pieces can make you want to dance.

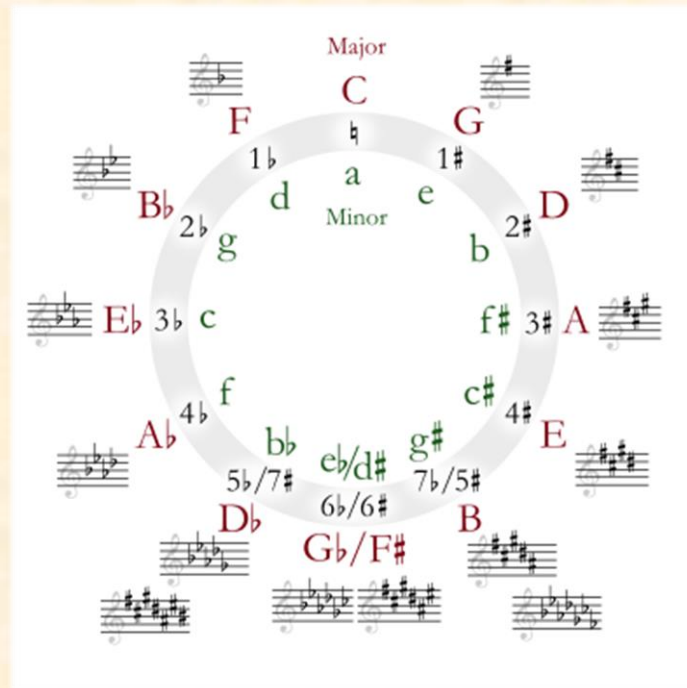
Each major key has a relative minor key with the same key signature. In both of these keys, the same notes are flattened, but they are based on different scales and use different chords which define the separate keys. To find a minor key with the same key signature as the major key you're looking at, take the note of the major key signature (the first note of the scale in that key signature), and count 3 semi-tones down. On that third note, you'll have reached the note of the minor key which has the same key signature. This is known as the relative minor (and vice versa).

Other than that, keys are a very hard concept to put down in writing – the best way to understand it is simply to learn the rest of this stuff and then you'll grasp it.

A more emotional way to talk about keys is that they're musical worlds. It's a little like different flavours of gum. The texture is still the same each time (if you're playing the same piece for example, in different keys), but the way it makes you feel, the unique experience of the gum is different between orange, strawberry and cola flavour, for example.



This diagram will help you more with your understanding of scales ; it is the Circle of Fifths. It tells you all the key signatures, with relative major and minor keys shown together. Like learning what the lines and spaces mean, the only way to learn it, is to learn it. So get cracking!



Scales

Ah, scales. The bane of every practising pianist's life. But they're the basis of all the best solos out there, and most of the best songs too. Whenever you hear your favourite pianist, guitarist, bassist, whatever, improvising a solo, they're usually only able to do it because they have a firm knowledge of scales and how they work.

Scales are an ascension of notes that sounds pleasing to the human ear. They go in cycles of octaves (eight notes). Once eight notes have been played, you're back on the same note as before, only an octave higher on the keyboard, and the cycle can begin again.

There are two kinds of scale, just like there are two kinds of key – major and minor. And as with the keys, every major scale has a relative minor scale which uses the same key signature and therefore flattens or sharpens the same notes, but sounds more solemn.

Scales are defined by their intervals and the order of said intervals.

The order for a major scale goes like this (below, the notes of the C major scale are written to help illustrate this point) ;

Whole tone, whole tone, semi-tone, whole tone, whole tone, whole tone, semi-tone.

C D E F G A B C

The order for a minor scale goes like this (below, the notes of the C minor scale are written to help illustrate this point) ;

Whole tone, semi-tone, whole tone, whole tone, semi-tone [whole tone + semitone], semi-tone.

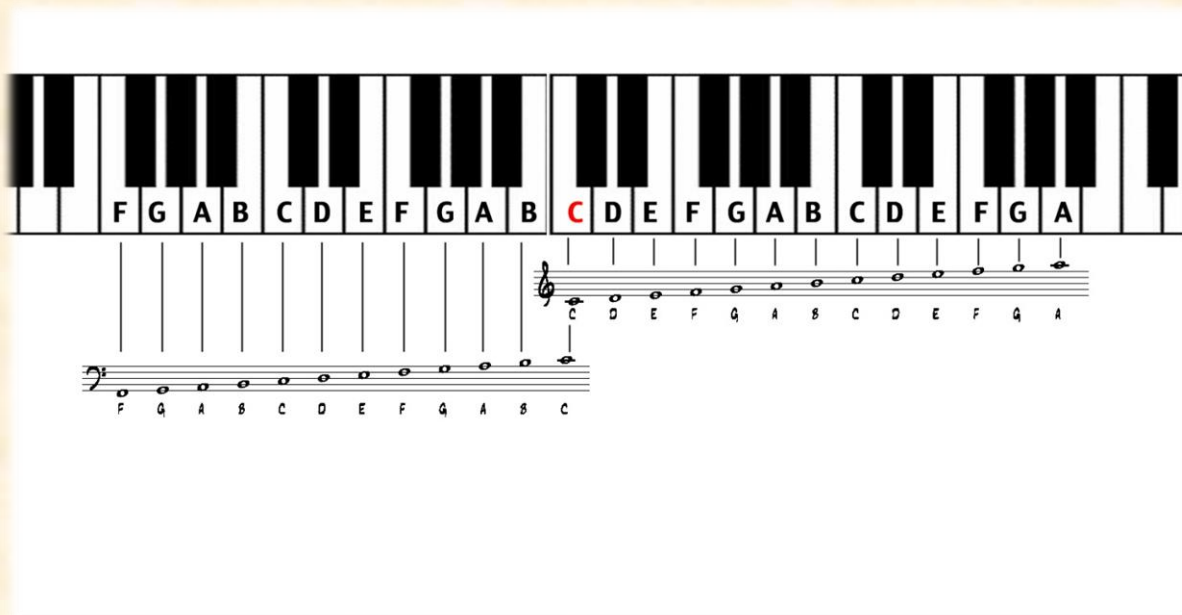
C Eb F G Ab B C

The seventh note of every scale (it appears to be the sixth on the diagrams above, that is because the starting note on each of those is left out, though the note at the end – C – is the starting note) is sharpened.

Scales are a great way to practise finger mobility, and to get you familiar with the keys. Do them.

Reading the Notes on the Stave

Here comes the tricky bit. You've already seen the piano stave, with the notes drawn on it. Well, each of those notes is represented either by a line in sheet music, or by a gap between the lines. The diagram below will help you recognize which notes go where. The only good way, is to learn them.



Dynamics

Dynamics simply refers to how quiet or loud a piece is. There are three main types of dynamics you need to know to get a grasp of the basics, and then crescendos and diminuendos. And then you'll know all the theory you need to get going on your own!

fff as fortissimo as possible

ff fortissimo (very loud)

f forte (loud)

mf mezzo forte (moderately loud)

mp mezzo piano (moderately soft)

p piano (soft)

pp pianissimo (very soft)

ppp as pianissimo as possible

This nifty little grid shows you what all of the different dynamics are, and what they mean. The symbols that show these dynamics in sheet music (the "f"s and "p"s written to the left) are written between the two clefs, in that little empty space. Crescendos and diminuendos are also written in that space.

What are crescendos and diminuendos?

They are just a way of slowly changing from one volume to another. That's all. Nothing scary.

A crescendo involves going from piano (quiet) to forte (loud). It is shown by this symbol in sheet music ;

A diminuendo involves going from forte (loud) to piano (quiet). It is shown by this symbol in sheet music ;

And that's it! You now know all the basics of playing piano and reading sheet music that you need. Stay tuned for issue #3, with general tips on playing and practising!

-Levi Talvi

Review of “Into the Old World We Go”

Our first review of the second issue! This is by a brand new dungeon synth artist called Lone Wizard that started up inbetween these issues, and sent me his demo via the Dungeon Synth Facebook page (be sure to check that out!).

01. Ghoul March

This is a very well-put-together ambient track - the intro doesn't sound amateurish at all, particularly for a guy's first attempt at dungeon synth. A few somehow melodic groans that really sound like they're coming from some unholy creature, give way to a synth sound very similar to the one used on Burzum's "Filosofem" (this seems to crop up a lot - coincidence?). This synth plays a repetitive riff that doesn't do too much to bore the listener. However, the vibrato on the synth does strike me at times as a tad annoying - although I know this isn't something the artist can easily control. The intro riff is later superseded by a slow, creeping synth that sounds a lot like an orchestra/organ that's been altered beyond all recognition. It sounds almost spacey, in particular due to the heavy contrast between the buzzing high and the thrumming low pitches.

While I must confess that the primary riff doesn't undergo a lot of melodic intervention/variation itself, the other synth parts in the track do a great deal to help keep it interesting. The song leans more towards the ambient side of dungeon synth, but this is by no means a detriment. My overall impression is that this song very much reminds me of journeying through the Plaguelands in World of Warcraft, and very much helps me get into a fantasy mood and primed for the rest of the demo.

02. Lone Temple

Stark contrast is what immediately springs to mind about this song. It's also got multi-layers of synths that hit you from the start, interweaving in a simple yet fascinating dance. In the intro, what sounds like a double bass plays a drone, which resonates beautifully. Above it, various other strings and flutes play haunting melodies and harmonies, while a kind of whistling permeates.

One thing I didn't like so much is that I think I heard a police siren in the background, however faint. That really broke my mood - it was an unhelpful reminder of the modern world I'm trying to escape through dungeon synth.

This very loud interplay between the double bass and various other parts morphs into a harp, being accompanied by some strings. It plays a lilting, very medieval-sounding melody (doing a lot to repair the damage to atmosphere caused by the police siren). Flutes and strings add some brilliant harmonies to the melody played by the harp (which, like in Ghoul March, doesn't change itself).

However, at some point, the harp melody does change. Though, it no longer becomes the harp melody. Instead, flutes and xylophones, and all other manner of strange instruments I can't quite place, play separate parts of a single melody, which walks along on a backdrop of the sound of tides rolling in the background. And on this peaceful, melodic note, the song ends. A single flute draws us into the end, and onto the final song of the demo.

03. Winter Land

The last track on the demo, "Winter Land", finishes off what "Lone Temple" started. It's a hauntingly melodic piece, with some very ambient sounds of wind in the background. What strikes one immediately is that this piece is significantly less percussive than the other two on this demo. Instead, most of the instruments here are more delicate, interweaving to provide a gentle, beautiful song.

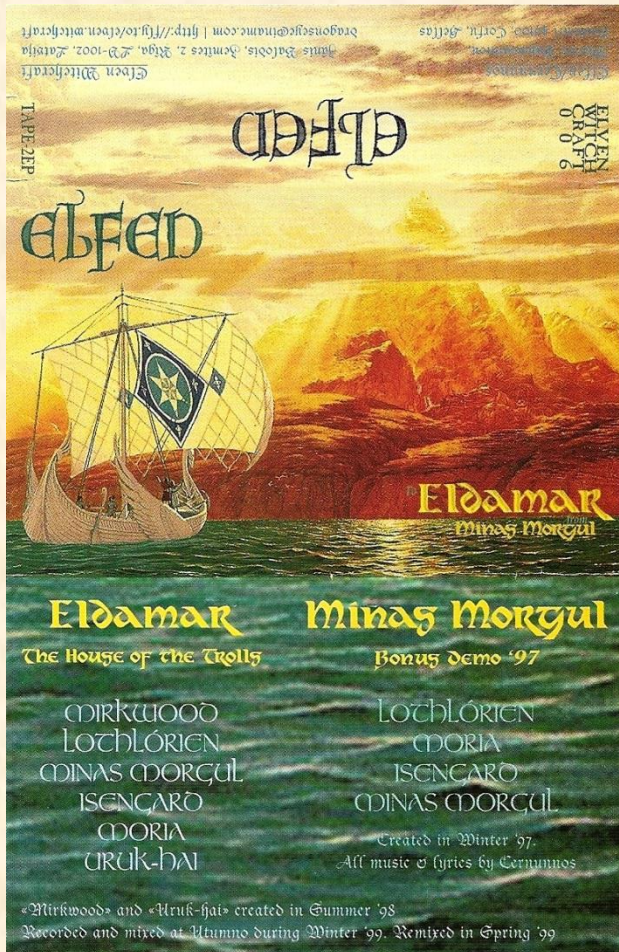
The song comprises of three main sections, which each end in a crescendo and give rise to a haunting stillness in the new section. These sections transport the listener through various moods. Ranging from intriguing, to sad, to scary and haunting. "Winter Land" is a great song to end a great demo. Also, the Lone Wizard shows his greatest compositional skill in this song, perhaps having learned from the first two. This piece contains the most variation on the demo.

Overall, "Into the Old World We Go" is a brilliant album with tonnes to offer the listener! 4 out of 5!

-Levi Talvi

Review of “From Eldamar To Minas Morgul”

“From Eldamar To Minas Morgul” is an EP released by the Greek dungeon synth act Elfen. One can gather straight from the title that this is a very Tolkeinesque work – it’s apparent even in the song titles. The cover of this EP, released on cassette in 1999, is very beautiful fantasy, not too specific as to tie one’s expectations to any one thing in particular.



Admittedly, I don’t know much else about this release, other than that it was released under “Elven Witchcraft, Morgueldar Dragonseyes”, a relatively obscure dungeon synth-oriented record label, and that the cover art (and the art which appears on the reverse side of the EP) was drawn by Ted Pasmith and Alan Lee, and used by the label/band without their permission.

So, without further delay, let us embark on what I am sure will be an enthralling adventure into the world of fantasy!

01 – Mirkwood

This intro to the EP is rather strange. The synths used on this song very much have an 80’s feel to them. It feels very much like the kind of music you’d hear in the background of a travel agency advertisement, except for the deep voice echoing over them. This marimba/woodwind synth carries on playing its happy melody, with only a simple few notes played lower in the register supporting the main melody.

As perhaps is to be expected of an intro, this piece doesn’t develop very much. It seems to change a little between the two slightly distinct parts of this song. In all honesty, this intro didn’t really help get me into an escapist, fantasy mood at all. The music itself sounded too happy, and the contrast with the voice was just offputting rather than anything else. I feel a slight bit of relief as a single faint drumbeat signals the end of this intro track.

02 – Lothlórien

Now this is more like it! This piece starts off with some beautiful keyboard melodies that fit much more into the genre of dungeon synth. Perhaps this is just my fandom coming out (they are, after all, the band that are responsible for me being a musician today), but I can’t help but feel like there is a bit of Nightwish influence on this song. Some of the melodies would certainly be at home in a symphonic metal song.

As before, the drums are very distant, and provide atmosphere more than rhythm.

The vocals this time are less booming, but still distorted beyond recognition. Thankfully, a lyric sheet is provided with some very immersing lyrics in them. However, the dark background of the sheet makes the lyrics themselves somewhat difficult to read, amazing though they are.

Much like a Nightwish song, the second track leads us through many different melodies, though always returning to a catchy and memorable verse and chorus riff. This song somehow takes those 80’s-sounding synths and makes them work!

03 – Minas Morgul

Much like the song “Lone Temple” on the Lone Wizard demo I reviewed earlier, this song starts out with a heavy booming bassline (apparently played on some woodwind instrument), over which various melodies are played and subsequently embellished.

The vocals are not as deep as before, nor as prominent. Most of the time they are whispered, and their distance makes them little more than background noise.

The first section of this piece ends on a chilling note, with the instruments and vocals slowly fading to the howls of wolves which herald the next section.

This second section sounds in some ways like the soundtrack to a horror film. There is one moment with a big dramatic riff, at high volume, accompanied by a demonic snarl. While brilliantly chilling, I’m not quite sure this song puts me into as much of a fantasy mood as I would like. It’s menacing, prowling synth lines and haunting ambient effects make me envision a horror film far more than a Medieval landscape.

However, the song title is the name of a pretty menacing city in the world of Tolkien. So, perhaps it’s only reasonable that this piece should echo that menace. In this fashion, banging gongs and the howls of wolves call an end to the third track on the EP.

04 – Isengard

Much like the first track on this EP, “Isengard” sounds almost mismatched. At times the pulsating drum and bass lines remind me more of electronic dance music than dungeon synth. At many points in this song the drums are too loud, too prominent and too digital for my tastes – they prove more of a distraction than an accompaniment to the main melodies, which aren’t all that inspiring.

Honestly, I don’t like this song. And I can’t find many positive things to say about it. At no point is this mood changed to something more along the lines of dungeon synth, but it stays in that rave state throughout.

05 – Moria

Again, with the 80’s synths. A couple of high bursts of that annoying old sound and a trobbing deep bassline give way to a more ambient section, accompanied by vocals. The melodies in this song fit a sword-and-sorcery theme much better, and remind me in some ways of Lord Lovidicus. The vocals play a more prominent role here than perhaps on any other songs on this demo. They are much less distorted and at times sound almost decipherable.

After the more ambient intro, this song launches into a fast-paced section, with jumping flute melodies and snatching vocals.

The following section seems to follow a similar recipe to the beginning of the song – a more melodic introduction, dominated by high-register melodies, followed by a booming metal-like part. When this section comes to an end, the first section returns, in the same format. This earlier melody brings the piece to the end, and I can’t say I’m upset it’s over.

06 – Uruk-Hai

The sixth piece on this album (finally!). It’s an outro, with a xylophone melody reminiscent of the Coraline soundtrack. Don’t get me wrong, I love this normally. Coraline’s my favourite movie after all! But not many artists can recreate that same chilling ambience very well. There are parts of this song that do it brilliantly, others not so well. I’ve got to say, that on the whole I enjoyed this song much more than some of the others, although it didn’t really invoke any fantasy images in my mind.

FINAL THOUGHTS: This EP isn’t particularly engaging for most dungeon synth listeners. It’s a challenge, certainly. Many parts of it will frustrate you, and take you on a musical journey to places you weren’t expecting to go. While perhaps it’s a bold experiment in trying to take dungeon synth to new places, I give this EP only 2 out of 5, and would not recommend it to all but the most adventurous dungeon synth listeners.

-Levi Talvi

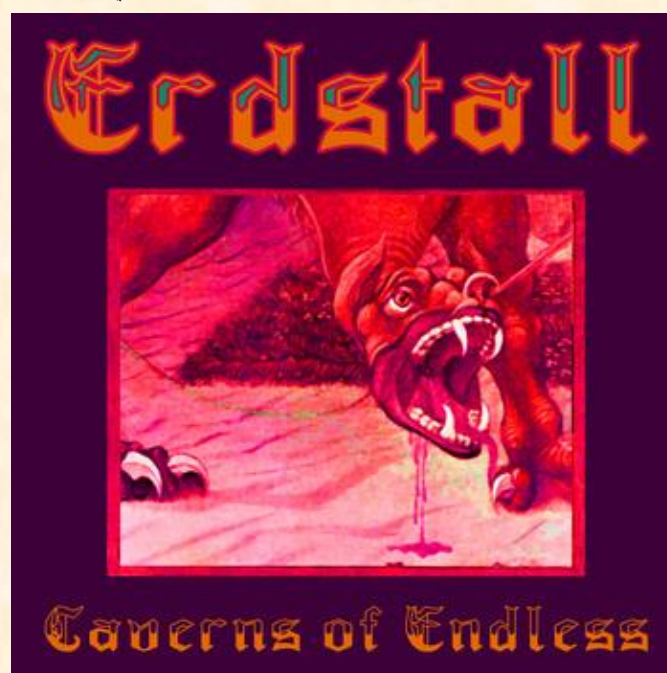
Review of “Caverns of Endless”

Erdstall plays some of the most titanicly huge dungeon synth music I have ever heard and also manages to push boundaries and challenge the definition of the genre. A relatively new act out of the United States, Erdstall, which refers to mysterious Medieval tunnels, is by far the slowest I have ever heard in the genre. In my personally opinion this is still dungeon synth, it is instrumental, synth based and fantasy focused music. This contrasts to the related genre of neoclassical darkwave which takes heavy influence from funeral doom but is not fantasy based (see Spirits of Gaia). Caverns of Endless is the second album for the project, and I think a step up from the debut. To put it bluntly the album is not very easy to describe, as I have never heard a record which took dungeon synth in quite this direction.

Opening with slow moving horns and lush droning lower tones, the half hour long Quest of Sorrow is a really huge track. Taking obvious cues from the first few Mortis albums, the track is split into many sections some more bombastic and some quieter. What really sets this work apart is the lush reverb and trudging pace. The structures slowly shift as new tracks come and go, and it all happens at such pace and in so dreamy a way that the transitions are sometimes seamless. There is a definite drone feel to this album as slow moving dungeon synth lines move about a murky expanse of lower synths. The whole thing is mixed so well and the effects applied so heavily that it really transcends the genre. This album is able to create a sense of fantasy almost hallucinatory in scope, even as it is clearly much less catchy than most, if not all dungeon synth albums I have personally heard.

The second and final number, the twenty three minute title track, is even more ambient than the first. Starting with a few minutes of droning work it moves into a sparse piano section before winding in and out of some very melancholy passages. The piano also seems a bit out of tune with the rest of the synths, which adds to the ominousness of the song. This is a very heavy track, though not sinister or depressingly sad. I would describe the song and the album in general as exhausting. Erdstall seems to capture the atmosphere of a very long and dangerous journey, one that would weigh on the body as well as the mind.

This is a very ambitious album that is sure to raise eyebrows. One of the points I want to make is that Erdstall really complicates the debate that dungeon and ambient music are separate. Even if you contend that they are, which I normally would, this record proves that the two can be fused to an incredibly powerful effect. While I would not recommend this album to the first time dungeon synth listener, I feel those members of the community who are familiar with the bigger names need to check it out. Personally I really like the current acts which push the boundaries rather than simply repeating the feel of the 90s albums. Abandoned Places comes to mind, although this is much less dissonant and much more psychedelic if I may use that term. If you like dungeon synth but also get into bands like Skepticism you need to hear this. Caverns of Endless can be downloaded for free at erdstall.bandcamp.com



-Anonymous

Interview with Arathgoth

Dungeons of Darkness interviews the man behind the dynamic dungeon synth band Arathgoth!

Interview with Arathgoth, part 2

Levi :

Tell our readers a little about your musical background.

Arathgoth :

I've started as a guitarist in several metal band. I use to play for 10 years before I had to leave to another region. Because I found myself alone, I've started to make something different and bought a synth. Then I also made music with my computer and found my way in that kind of music. I really love Dungeon Synth, Ambient and Atmospheric music because it gives you a huge creative freedom.

Levi :

What inspired you to start up your music?

Arathgoth :

Because of Erang who made me discover this whole musical world. He converted me to his cause.

Levi :

What influences your music? You seem to have a variety of influences, with music touching on almost space-like themes, to distinctly Medieval-sounding dungeon synth.

Arathgoth :

This is a wide question... My influence comes from other music, movies, video games and books. I don't have a black metal culture, even if I listen to band such as Burzum or Emperor and even so called commercial like Cradle Of Filth or Dimmu Borgir... But I rather prefer bands like Summoning and Amon Amarth. About my own musical project I've been influenced by fantasy movie's soundtrack and science fiction movies (Dune, Lord Of The Ring, Willow, Dark Crystal, Star Trek, 2001, etc.) I'm a big fan of John Carpenter and the soundtrack of Conan from Poledouris reminds one of my favorite soundtrack. About books, I'm a reader of Tolkien, Robert E Howard, Perry Rhodan, Roddenberry, Asimov, etc... And about video games I stay very old school : Zelda, Eye Of The Beholder, Doom, Heretic... In fact, I have to feel a strong emotion in order to get some inspiration.

Levi :

Why did you choose the name Arathgoth?

Arathgoth :

Choosing a name was very difficult! It was the birth of my character in this musical universe. It was hard to find a name to him... but without particular reason it suddenly appears as an evidence: it was Arathgoth, that was him !

Levi :

Is there a particular message you want to put across with Arathgoth?

Arathgoth :

There is no particular message. Only some feelings, some journey, that I want to share.

Levi :

Do you do this project alone or do you have others working with you on it?

Arathgoth :

I work alone but I discuss a lot with Erang and Anakeion during the conception of the album. They have an objective point of view about my work and helps when I doubt about something.

Levi :

What music software and equipment do you use to record?

Arathgoth :

I mainly use my computer and some software but I play also guitars and synth. I love the MIDI so I use amps and pedal effects that I built myself ! I also like field recordings and sound effect : recently, I was chopping some wood and the sound of the axe was interesting. I record this and used it as the rhythmic base of "The Way Of The Axe"...

Music is everywhere!

Interview with Arathgoth, part 2

Lebi :

Do you have an ideal listener?

Arathgoth :

Not really. I wish to touch anybody – music unifies people.

Lebi :

That's very true! I know of an old African proverb which goes something like this ; "A whole village cannot talk all at the same time, but we can all sing at the same time and in that way present a single voice."

Could you give us a little insight into your creative process?

How do you write songs?

Arathgoth :

Most of the time I imagine a story or a picture and I try to find a theme which could match it.

Because it could happen anywhere, I have an app on my smartphone which emulate a piano and gives me the opportunity to record a rough idea of the tune. Later, I rework it on my computer. I like to start with a theme and make it evolve until I bring it to his climax.

Lebi :

Should fans listen to your music in a certain kind of setting, or is it supposed to be listened to anywhere at any time?

Arathgoth :

One could listen to my music at any time but I guess it's more a music you listen to like you would read a book. You don't read a book with friends and without attention. But you can read it anywhere you want... This is how I see my music.

Lebi :

I noticed you're signed to Katabaz records. Tell us a little about the label - if you're allowed to - and about how they have helped you get your music out there?

Arathgoth :

Once again it is Crang who get me in the label. We are all very close or good friends. We share a lot together. The label helped me promoting my music which is nice.

Lebi :

Where can fans find your music?

Arathgoth :

My music is on bandcamp (<http://arathgoth.bandcamp.com>) and Youtube (. I've decided to sell my music to see its impact on the audience : when I'm willing to buy an album it is because I really appreciate it. Not only another mp3 on my playlist !

Lebi :

Do you have any last messages for our listeners?

Arathgoth :

Thank for caring about my music ! I really thank those who supports me : "Alan With No Fate" is a part of my personal story that I share with them. I also take this opportunity to announce that I'll release an Ep related to winter before the end of the year : "Southern Solstice". Thank you for this interview !

Review of “Capitulatio de partibus Saxoniae”

In issue #001 of Dungeons of Darkness, I interviewed MacTaidh, the creator of the dynamic new dungeon synth act, Hrungnir.

Well, I’m very pleased to say that Hrungnir’s first EP is out, “Capitulatio de partibus Saxoniae”. And he even mentioned me in the insert, which I though was very nice of him! From the magazine and myself – thank you MacTaidh!

So, of course, I have to review this.

Unlike most of my reviews, where I write a general introduction to the band and album/demo/EP if I can before listening to them song-by-song and writing my impressions of each as I go along, I have listened to this EP twice beforehand. So I can give a good overview of the whole thing before we go into it song-by-song.

The EP itself is very good, and also very distinct. The production on this is excellent, as are the VST’s or MIDI files that are used. “Capitulatio de partibus Saxoniae” (which according to the insert translated to “Ordinances concerning Saxony”) is remarkably well-produced for a dungeon synth EP and definitely doesn’t have that low-fi quality that a lot of dungeon synth has as a reminder of its black metal roots.

The album itself is a concept album, about the Holy Roman Emperor Charlemagne conquering Saxony and forcibly converting it to Christianity in 782 CE. On the insert there is a brief history of this struggle, explaining how Saxons who practised their native religion and culture would be put to death under the new laws in the “Capitulatio de partibus Saxoniae”. In some ways it reads almost like the manifesto of a black metal musician intent on arson.

All jokes aside however, the message on the insert is plainly clear – it is in a way a sort of remembrance for those brave 4,500 Saxons who were beheaded for following in their culture. As well as a brief (if biased) history of the associated events, the insert also contains a few moral conjectures on pagan philosophy littered in with MacTaidh’s telling of the historical context. Accordingly, the insert ends with the triumphant or defiant (however you wish to interpret it) “Hail Irminsul! Hail Woden!”

Some final generally interesting points about the EP include the use of Saxon language in the title track. Furthermore, as with a lot of dungeon synth releases, this one comes with “lyrics” telling the story behind each song, with the obvious exception of track 5, which is a Disaster cover.

So, without any further ado, let’s get onto looking at each of these song-by-song! (For the record, there are two bonus tracks on the EP, but these are from the “Hymns to Bragi” demo, so I’ve decided not to review these.)

01. Wyn Ceal Gedreas

The opening track (which means “All the Joy Has Died” in English) starts out with brief farm-noises before a deep growling voice that appears to be played backwards utters a brief sentence. On a sudden, the music very jarringly changes course. In the very beginning there is only the sounds of a choir in the distant background, the animals and then the growled voice. This then changes dramatically – the choir becomes much louder, as if they were closer by. An orchestra joins in, adding their instrumental accompaniment to the choir.

For the first section of this song (after the farm-animal introduction...), the choir and orchestra march on in a dramatic, mournful, anticipative dirge very much in the style of Daudi Baldrs. Crashing cymbals roar through the harmonies, each time raising the tension to new heights. While the melody itself is not harmonized amazingly or developed very much, it is most enjoyable, fits the mood and is repeated sufficiently to keep from becoming a bore.

This then breaks off to the strings playing a very low-register melody which hums on ominously before the voice again returns, giving some dire, indiscernible message before a cello returns, playing a counterpoint melody over the low-register string accompaniment. The choir then returns, showing how what appeared to be a new melody was really just an accompaniment for the initial dirge.

However, this time the dirge is more varied. After a while, the choir starts to sing a slightly different melody, while the cello and orchestra weave their harmonies along with them in a prayerful dance. It has a very medieval feel to it, sounding just like a Medieval choir in plainchant.

The "lyrics" very much echo the sentiments on the insert. They are a powerfully defiant description of a Saxon priest offering an animal sacrifice to the gods, and goading his men for the fight with Charlemagne. He reminds them of the glory of their ancestry and the sovereignty of their homeland. He insists that it is better to die in a blaze of glory, fighting for one's land and culture than to cave in to tyranny. Many references are made to pagan gods and rites.

The "lyrics" appropriately end on a chilling note, "Blood brings us power!". And the music echoes this also, with what appears to be a woodwind section playing a single note to bring an anticlimactic end to this most dramatic of pieces.

02. Bearer of the Core and Ram-Horned Serpent

The "lyrics" to this song paint a very mysterious picture of a Stag Lord (presumably a Saxon god of some description) meditating. He holds the symbol of nobility in one hand (presumably the Core) and the Ram-Horned Serpent in the other. The music itself is slightly more percussive than one might expect from such a tranquil theme, with a raspy pan flute playing a relatively fast-paced melody which brings to mind the beauty of nature and the forest. A harp plays single notes alongside it to accompany. At some point, the two switch roles – the flute becomes accompaniment and the harp begins to play a more interesting melody.

Then this peaceful meditation is very suddenly broken off into a haunting riff played by a strings section in a low register. This jolting transition between different parts of a song is in some ways a flaw on this album – MacTaidh might do better on his next release to use some degree of reverb or with some other method achieve a smoother transition between songs. The voice also returns in this section, again indiscernible over the strings.

This new haunting section is very appropriately matched to the "lyrics", which speak of an obscure cult of the Stag Lord, lost to the ages. Known by the trees and mountains, lost to antiquity. Adding to the mystique, a second string melody is played over the lower-key one. There is some degree of counterpoint, although there is some discordance at times.

At the end, the song returns to its peaceful meditative state, repeating the same melody with the same instrumentation and structure as was heard at the start of the song. Perhaps this was meant to make the song more of a complete statement – telling us of the Stag Lord's meditation, and then of his journey through that meditation into his mysterious past, before he returns to a still present. "Bearer of the Core and the Ram-Horned Serpent" is a very intriguing song indeed!

03. Scorn and Blood Run Down The River Ván

This song starts off with a glockenspiel melody mirrored by strings and punctuated by ominous bells. The gentle strings very much give the impression of a flowing river, with the glockenspiel and bells ensuring that there is some feeling of continuity – of journey.

The first section of this song is very repetitive, with no real variation in the melody that keeps the song interesting. Eventually the glockenspiel line simplifies – it no longer plays the melody, merely the accompaniment. But even this is only brief, and sure enough the main theme we heard from the beginning of this piece returns. Although this time it is slightly altered, the melody is still familiar and doesn't add very much to the song to be heard again.

At the end of the song we hear the snarls of wolves, which grow louder as the strings slowly play the melody in a fading dirge.

Oddly breaking from the Saxon theme, the "lyrics" tell of the story of Fenrir and his deception and imprisonment by the Norse gods. The "lyrics" read much like those on Burzum's first ambient album *Daudi Baldur* – they tell the bare bones story of the mythology behind the song. Interestingly enough, these "lyrics" seem to tell the story from the perspective of Fenrir himself. There are many references to the trickery and deception behind his plight.

For those who don't know – in Norse mythology Fenrir was the son of Loki (the Norse god of fire and mischief) whom the AEsir tried to domesticate. However, he proved untameable, and so after having bitten off Tyr's right hand, Fenrir was bound forever and a sword placed in his mouth. From that mouth blood and saliva flowed, and this is what formed the river Ván.

Overall, this song was not very interesting. The "lyrics" were somewhat interesting, but did not compensate for the music.

04. Son of Nine Mothers

The last original song of the album, "Son of Nine Mothers", tells the very grim story of Heimdallr. The "lyrics" speak of how he stands on the sky cliffs of Himminbjorg, keeping watch over the Bifrost. He is a powerful sentinel – his eyes and ears hear all – from the sprouting of grass to the growing of wool on a sheep's back, no sound can escape his ears.

There is also a sense of foreboding, both in the "lyrics" of the song and the music. The "lyrics" tell of the upcoming struggle between Loki and Heimdallr, which will result in both of their deaths, while the world burns and falls into the sea.

Musically, this piece is somewhat more varied than others on this EP. It certainly has a different feel to the others, being more digital and low-fi than previous songs on this EP. Oddly enough, it reminds me a lot of the Age of Kings soundtracks – distinctly medieval, designed to fit into the background, but still digital enough that one can tell it was made on computers and with enough life of its own to be interesting.

Perhaps the song could have had a bit more grandeur to fit the theme appropriately. For a song about the glorious vigil of Heimdallr, the music is quite piddly. A less raspy flute than was heard earlier in the EP plays a relatively fast-moving line, while a harp plays either simple broken chords or single notes for accompaniment. The first section is nice enough, although it brings to mind images of peasants working in the fields more readily than one of a powerful watchman.

There is, however, a break later which is a lot more menacing. This small phrase sounds very much like the music played when one encounters undead creatures in a fantasy MMORPG. While this mood is maybe more closely aligned to the gravitas this song deserves, it doesn't quite portray the drama of the "lyrics" as much as I would like – there is an air of deception and trickery more than stalwartness.

Then the flute melody returns again, with little variation of note on its initial theme. The more ominous "undead" section of before returns once, and then the flute melody presides 'til the end of the song. Again, there is little variation. Much like "Wyn Eal Gedreas", this song ends with a single note played by a new instrument. An interesting phenomenon...

05. Across the Bloodlands (Desaster cover)

It should be noted that I have not heard the original of this song, so I don't really know what I should be judging the cover against. For obvious reasons, this track doesn't have any "lyrics" assigned to it.

The music is perhaps maniacally happy considering the grim nature of the song title. Much like the previous track, a flute plays a very light-hearted, happy melody with a harp providing sparse accompaniment. I love the way that the harp accompaniment moves up and down while the main flute melody doesn't – it's a brilliant bit of counterpoint!

At about the middle of the song, there is a long single note from the flute, and I'm tricked into thinking the song is over (in line with previous songs on this EP). But it isn't – the main melody kicks in again.

Although this doesn't have any bearing on Hrungnir itself, as the song is a cover, "Across the Bloodlands" is not a very inspired song in terms of its composition. In this cover there are only really two melodies that we hear. Even their accompaniments aren't isolated and then developed like some dungeon synth artists like to do.

Perhaps the two bonus tracks are meant to complete this EP and leave it on a slightly better note. But in the present state that I'm listening to it in, I don't think it's a great end to the EP – but this is more my own fault rather than that of the artist.

Final Thoughts : "Capitulatio de partibus Saxoniae" is a very promising EP from Hrungnir! Some of the songs have excellent composition, and although the EP overall in its songwriting exhibits some beginner mistakes, these are easily compensated for by the brilliant production. I did feel that the farm-animal sounds on the first track were a bit confusing, but they didn't really damage my perception of the song at all.

Overall, I give it a 3/5 and would recommend it for the readers of Dungeons of Darkness!

You can purchase the EP here : <http://hrungnir.bandcamp.com/album/capitulatio-de-partibus-saxoniae>

-Levi Talvi

Review of “Another World Another Time”

Much like *Hrungnir*, *Erang* is also another dungeon synth act I interviewed in the first issue of *Dungeons of Darkness*. Their new album, “Another World Another Time” was released on bandcamp on the 13th of September, 2013.

You can purchase a digital version of the album here : <http://erang.bandcamp.com/album/another-world-another-time>

There is very little on the bandcamp page which gives us the meaning behind this album in particular, but from some of the song titles, and the album art showing a lamentful skeletal figure gazing upon a fantasy castle, I get the feeling the album’s about that feeling of wanting to escape into a different world. That is, after all, the very ethos of dungeon synth – escaping to a land of sword and sorcery, a medieval soundscape...



But I already went on that pretentious rant in issue #1! So, without further ado, let’s get on with the song-by-song review!

01. The Kingdom of Erang

The first song to this album starts out much like Lord Lobidicus’ 2010 album “Quenta Silmarillon”, with an acoustic guitar melody. I can’t be quite sure if this sound was recorded analogue – with a real acoustic guitar – or if it is made from MIDI files. Either way, the acoustic guitar leads us in to an interesting melody with a lot of counterpoint. Two separate guitar lines play interweaving parts alongside a flute that plays single-note accompaniment and a harp providing more flourishing embellishments.

After about a minute and a half of this, though, the rather more jovial melody from before slows down, disappears and is instead replaced with a very ominous, low-register brass line accompanied by some

occasional percussion. Shortly afterwards, it is joined by a flute again, although the sombre new melody persists.

Then, the melody we heard at the start makes a triumphant return, with the same percussion fitting in with it neatly. It plays out happily enough, then slows and fades away, with a single harp playing the melody. The final note fades to what feels like the end of the song.

But all of a sudden, the brass comes back in playing what appears to be a more minor development from the original theme. The drums come back in full force, along with crashing cymbals adding to the tension, although this time they pound out a different rhythm. The song ends on this dramatic note, with a long note held by the brass, until it is crushed by the cacophony of a cymbal. And with that the song rests.

02. Hymn To My Teenage Broken Dreams

To be totally honest, the title of this track suggests a bit more angst than I’d like. I guess, along with my interpretation of the general theme of the album, that this song is about teenagers who obsess over *Lord of the Rings* and dark music and dream of leaving this mundane existence to something different and exciting. Perhaps I just get turned off by the title because I don’t like imagining that I am one of those teenagers with broken dreams.

Regardless, I ought not to judge this song by its title – it should be judged by the music itself, and I will do so. To be honest, I preferred this song to the first track because it doesn’t appear as disjointed to me. In the first track many of the sections don’t transition very well, and at times it feels like the song should be ending, but then it instantly changes to something that sounds like a whole new song. I don’t appreciate this too much – but then again, it is just my own personal taste talking.

The music of this song starts off with a rather calming harp melody. The soothing effect is greatly added to by the sound of gentle strings, and other instruments with very little attack which slowly find their way into this song. It very much indeed feels like a dream – the song in general feels like a daydream so vivid that for a second one believes it is real.

At about one and a half minutes through, cymbals and some sparse percussion come in. While they are not obtrusive, they do change the mood of the song a bit. It makes the listener perk up and pay attention. But what is perhaps far more ear-catching than this is an odd chugging sound in the background. If I didn't know any better, I would say it was a very low-volume and heavily distorted electric guitar.

After a long chorus section, with the main theme repeating often and various other instruments playing their separate melodies, the song falls back to just strings, that same not-quite-there chugging noise, and piano. The piano plays a familiar-sounding new melody (perhaps a variation on the initial theme?), before the strings and that electric guitar sound fade away into obscurity.

While I found the composition fascinating (the main theme did repeat a lot, but it was long enough not to be so boring, and the harmonies Crang weaved around it were certainly engrossing), I have to be honest when I say that the piano and guitar sort of ruined the song for me. Pianos generally break my dungeon synth mood, unless they're done very carefully.

But then again, personal taste. Don't let that put you off!

03. March of the Grey Legion

This star is rather...undramatic for its title. But I suppose we're all guilty of this in dungeon synth every now and again!

I genuinely loved this. "March of the Grey Legion" is a very minimalist piece, which despite its starts evolves into a very well-composed and marching song. One melody is taken from the beginning, and passed around through various instruments (strings, brass, a flute...) and at one point a choir. There are drums playing in the most march-like moments that really give the impression of war like the title would suggest. That, and the stalwart (but suitably varied so as not to become boring) repetition give that grim Medieval feeling that makes this piece so awesome!

04. The Forester's Grandson

This is a nice piece, which starts out sounding much like a video game soundtrack, with a simple dual guitar melody lead.

The melody seems to repeat throughout – although there are two brief periods where it slows, only to return to the original.

After the second "slow period", the original theme returns in an altered form. The two instrument lines interweave to create brilliant counterpoint, and the drums which come in later on the piece add a defining rhythmic element to this piece.

05. The Great Castle Gate

A fairly ominous riff played by brass and backed up by a choir marks the intro to this song. A harp-like instrument then comes in later, playing some sort of variation on the main theme, moving relatively quickly.

A dramatic crash. And silence.

Everything is stripped bare – one can only just about make out some faint sounds in the background. Crows and the sound of wind.

Then, the harp comes in, playing a relatively simple melody which gradually fades in. It is later joined by a piano which joins the other instruments in a very gradual crescendo.

Nearer the end of the piece, the piano suddenly bursts into action! It flourishes into one of the fastest keyboard riffs I have ever heard in dungeon synth – truly a virtuoso performance. This swift piano riff is accompanied by some strings, as it undergoes several variations, until finally the strings draw this song to its rest.

I must say – the piano work in "The Great Castle Gate" is some of the most impressive I have ever heard in the dungeon synth genre! It truly shows Crang's ability as a keyboardist! A fantastic piece indeed!

06. The High Tower

As with "The Forester's Grandson", this song starts out with two acoustic guitars playing interweaving melodies. They're nice enough, and certainly very evocative. However, their tranquillity is shattered by the introduction of this synth which frankly just sounds weird – it sounds like strings, but *HEAVILY* distorted. Doesn't do it for me. No...

Then that breaks off all too quickly, to what sounds like steel drums playing a variation on the original theme in this song. Maybe I'm too narrow-minded, but steel drums don't do it in terms of fantasy, for me. It kind of broke my mood a lot. Then again, I am a very biased person in these regards.

After the steel drum interval, that horrible distorted strings noise starts ringing out again. The two guitar lines play another variation on their original theme, with another synth playing more intricate harmonies in the background.

The piece ends on a nice, simpler note, with all other instruments fading away and the guitars playing a brief reprise. Overall, though, I didn't like this song – primarily due to the poor choice of synths and instrumentation.

07. Vortex

I'm not a massive fan of the synth that starts off this piece. It sounds a bit like distorted strings, though the melody is less obvious and the sound more artificial. The melody itself is not very inspired – it relies more on the sound of the synth (which wobbles a lot) rather than the melody itself. It's also incredibly repetitive – a drone really.

This drone later gives way to some other synth which sounds more like real strings, and some pounding drums. Later these are joined by a synth that in all honesty would be better suited to space music – it sounds very much like the music they use to introduce an alien spaceship or alien character in a movie. I can't say it appealed very much to me, and didn't help with the atmosphere all that much.

The arrangement on "Vortex" is not very inspiring, with little melodic variation of note. The composition is also quite lacking. Most of it is uninspired and relies on repetition a little too much. None of the melodies are particularly memorable either. In some ways I think this song sounds like a black metal song arranged on keyboards. I come away from "Vortex" remembering everything but its substance, and altogether I'm not that impressed with it.

08. Old Child

"Old Child"... It's certainly an interesting oxymoron. I'm not 100% sure what it means, but it is certainly a very interesting title!

Ambient winds and some quiet strings draw us quickly into this song. The first part of this song is a very choppy section. While it is quite mystical-sounding, and the melody does change quite a lot into very interesting forms, I personally didn't like the marching feel of the first part of this film. It was a little too rhythmic for the instrumentation that Erang chose in this piece. (But as I always say – that was just my personal taste. Others may agree or disagree!)

The piece marches on in this fashion. Numerous different instruments chip in and lend their voice to the counterpoint at various stages of the song.

Around two minutes into the song, most of this peels away. All we are left with is the sound of blowing winds, which are soon joined by the guitar. This plays a variation on the initial theme. As before, eventually this evolves into the first theme, and many different instruments contribute at various stages until one is left with a swirling mass of instruments all operating by the rules of this one melody.

Towards the end of the song, however, there is another stage where this melody drops away. I'm not too fond of the transition though. Don't get me wrong – I love sharp contrast in dynamics, and letting a massively loud piece suddenly break down to near silence can work brilliantly at times. But I felt there was little in the way of transition here – the instruments simply fell silent altogether. And when the music started up again, it was on a different synth that sounded totally different. I genuinely thought this was the end of one song and the start of another.

A single synth finishes off this song. It sounds much like steel drums, only more digital. These play a very bouncy melody, which very quietly ends this song.

09. Veil of Oblivion

This is a beautifully ambient piece. Whispered vocals (I at least cannot understand what is being said) and a distant choir lead us in. These vocals gradually fade, as the choir takes over.

The piece progresses very solemnly. It has a quiet sense of dignity to it. "Veil of Oblivion" doesn't need much to say much. Although I would have slightly preferred if the synths used didn't sound so digital, it doesn't detract from the atmosphere at all.

Eventually, the choir and strings come to a standstill, at what I thought was the end of the piece.

Then, the strings and the voice return. Again, the lyrics are incedipberable. But this time the melody is new and different, although there wasn't much noticeable repetition in the rest of the song either. The melody played here is somewhat more sinister, and it slowly fades into silence as the piece ends.

10. Those Who Left Their Home

This song fades in with some very plucky instruments. These play unaccompanied for a brief period before other synths join in the mix, much like on "Old Child". The melody is somewhat repetitive, but it develops and changes sufficiently so as not to be boring. Complex counterpoint and harmony also help to keep this piece interesting and dynamic.

After the first "section" of the song, where the initial theme is heard, there is a new section which sounds very much like it was recorded analogue. Something that sounds like a lyre is pretty much strummed, with beautiful arpeggiation. This new lyre and other instruments develop a beautiful new melody together. Because of the very realistic sound of the lyre (or other similar instrument – I can't quite be sure what sound it is supposed to be), the last section of "Those Who Left Their Home" carries a distinctly Medieval feel to it.

11. In The Hall Of The Eternal Darkness

This piece is marked by a very familiar-sounding drone, played on a very digital synth. However, the piece is wonderfully composed to the extent that one barely even notices the drone's constant presence.

While not totally mood-shattering, this song did in many ways feel too digital for me. Although, as I said, the composition was brilliant so that the music in itself was good, the way it was expressed could perhaps have been better. The synths sounded quite artificial to me. They reminded me a little of the 80's sounding synths on the Elfin album (although, as I said there, it can work.)

There are two main variations on the drone that repeat, and they both feature different instruments. One stars a very heavy percussive sound. The other melody is played by a string-like synth.

Like "The Forester's Grandson", I think it's best to listen to this song as if it were background music for a computer game. It very much has that sword-and-sorcery, AAA soundtrack feel to it. As, for that matter, do many of the songs on this album.

12. The Lonely Madman

The start to this song seriously made me cry. I don't know why – but it legitimately made me well up! It's so beautifully appropriate to the title, and the melody itself is haunting, played on a single guitar. The beauty of the melody is there and yet haunting in the absence of one certain unknown element. And it tugs at my heartstrings.

OK, Levi, reel it in a little...

The guitar doesn't stay alone throughout the whole song. It is later joined by another plucked instrument, and some very faint strings which lay a harrowingly sombre musical backdrop. While some of the themes do repeat a lot in this song, they are sufficiently varied so as not to sound boring, and their soul is not lost through being hammered into the earth.

Nearer the end, the guitars stop, and all we are left with is a slow-moving strings section. Its ambience and mood and storytelling in and of itself is so wonderful. At the very last section of this song the guitars play on their own – a mournful statement from a single musical voice drawing towards the end of this mystical masterpiece!

Haunting is the word to describe this piece overall. Its simplicity and ambience are just so beautiful! It's not background music – it makes you pay attention and draws you in to the saddest story. It really makes one picture a madman, all alone. Perhaps he (or she) is in the woods, slowly going mad as they try to turn to the trees for comfort. They grow insane as the craving for human contact in the vast wilderness becomes too great.

Or maybe you interpret it differently. It could be a madman who, while surrounded by his/her fellow human beings, is cut off from them by the limitations of their own mind.

Although it is nothing alike in terms of its composition or instrumentation, "The Lonely Madman" sounds to me a lot like "The Crying Orc" by Burzum. It has that same feeling – the same air of regret and loneliness. Ensombed.

Also – here's a shoutout to all my fellow Avatars out there – it reminds a lot of the Fog of Lost Souls in the Legend of Korra. The song evokes all those feelings of regret, of loneliness and of separation from all that is good stable, and above all else, different.

"The Lonely Madman" conveys the powerful message of being lost in your own mind forever.

I'm probably just reading into it too much...but this song really got to me! Great job, Erang!

13. Forever Lost In An Endless Dream

I might want to take back that last sentence.

This song honestly did not impress me at all. It is the longest song on the album, much like "Winter Land" on the Lone Wizard demo, and as a result I expected a similar kind of planning – to use the biblical expression of saving the best 'til last. Clearly, that did not transpire.

As harsh as this sounds, I honestly feel this song tarnishes in some way the otherwise outstanding album as a whole. The Burzum influence is blatantly obvious – the song is very similar in composition to "Kundgang Um Die Transzendente Saule Der Singularitat", and in instrumentation also.

The piece is dominated by synths that sound almost identical to those used on Filosofem, and the riff they play sounds almost identical to the one in "Kundgang Um Die Transzendente Saule Der Singularitat"! In a similar fashion, it repeats on and on as a drone, only this is not varied or harmonized on at all (other than a very slowly moving string section behind the lead synth, as was the case on Kundgang).

Once I was reading a review of Burzum's "Daudi Baldrs" (which happens to be one of my favourite dungeon synth albums ; so much so that I even covered the whole thing!). As with most reviewers of that album, this guy was very critical. He said of many of the pieces there that, while there may be some deeper meaning to the seemingly simplistic songs, the listeners only undertake that effort because of the fame of Burzum, and they would not do so if it was an unknown artist, thus implying that the meaning is not adequately conveyed in the music.

I think a very similar thing happens here. The song mimicks Kundgang far too much – it even has similar sections within the song for Christ's sake! I guess if one were listening to it in a meditative trance it might be nice, and in some ways it's a nice song to put at the end of the album, though I felt that an album which did so well up 'til now could have been given a better send-off.

Final Thoughts : *Despite a poorly composed and delivered finishing track, this was a superb album overall! At times I felt some of the songs had trouble instilling a truly Medieval/fantasy ambience through the music, and a few troubles with storytelling and appropriation to the music (although almost all dungeon synth artists are guilty of this, including myself!). However, this is largely down to my own interpretation and tastes, and others may agree or disagree.*

I think most people agree with my general view that the album is top-notch dungeon synth, and a brilliant new release that will stand proud in the Erang discography. My favourite songs on it, as you may have already gathered, were "The Forester's Grandson" and "The Lonely Madman". I give this album four out of five overall, and I'd highly recommend it to our readers!

-Levi Talvi

OUT
NOW!

Marghaash

"Durch Wälder depressiver Stille"

Mithrim Records is proud to announce the release of the EP by Marghaash (formerly Draupnir). Just over 29 minutes of obscure and primitive Dungeon Synth on pro-dubbed cassettes. 3.00GBP plus postage. Strictly limited to 33 copies.

<http://mithrimrecords.blogspot.co.uk/>
mithrimrecords@hotmail.co.uk



Interview with Narghaash

To celebrate the inaugural release by Mithrim Records we decided to interview Heimdall of Narghaash to learn more about this enigmatic project. If you appreciate obscure and lo-fi Dungeon Synth from the nineties then there will doubtless be much about 'Durch Wälder depressiver Stille' that will please you. (This interview was done by Mithrim Records!)

Mithrim Records : So the EP 'Durch Wälder depressiver Stille' is about to be released. What can you tell us about this work?

Heimdall : 'It is nearly a "re - release". I released it previously as "Trist Journey" under the band name Draupnir. It was only available to download and the quality was very, very bad. On this new version I changed the songs a little bit and I added some other songs. It's quite different from the old Draupnir release. The music on this EP is still very dark and obscure. The whole work is inspired by Depressive Silence's tapes. The title of my EP might also be a little homage to them ("Durch Wälder depressiver Stille" means "Through forests of Depressive Silence" in German.)'

Mithrim Records : Can you tell us something about the history of Narghaash?

Heimdall : 'Narghaash started in 2012 under the name "Draupnir". But my project was often confused with two other bands with the same name, so I decided to change the project's name into Narghaash. It has started as Dungeon Synth and Black Metal. A good friend of mine, Werewolf from Godocide, had helped me very much. For example he did the mastering of "Durch Wälder depressiver Stille". And he's a part of my project, he sometimes makes the drums for some Black Metal tracks.'

Mithrim Records : The name Narghaash is derived from Tolkien's mythopoeia. Why did you choose that title?

Heimdall : 'I have chosen this title on one hand because the word "Narghaash" stands in the dark speech for "cold" and I think it suits to the atmosphere I have the intention to create ,and on the other hand, because the world Tolkien has made is absolutely fascinating and a really big inspiration for me.'

Mithrim Records : What is your motivation for creating music? Why did you start out on this path?

Heimdall : The first time, I really wanted to make such a kind of music was as I heard "Minas Morgul" from Summoning and "Daudi Baldrs" from Burzum the first time . I was totally fascinated about the atmosphere both creates, especially the keyboard only tracks like "Soul Wandering" from Summoning. I discovered the Dungeon Synth genre .

Then I tried to play own melodies on the keyboard in the same style and made some cassettes with songs and melodies I created. Then heard from a friend of mine, he has a black metal project called Godocide. We started to make some songs together and later we had the Idea to make a Split together. We released this Split and it was the first record with songs of mine which was available to buy. The biggest motivation to make such a kind of music is just to create songs which suits to mostly dark atmospheres, old tales or feelings. And of course to keep a very interesting and obscure genre alive !

Mithrim Records : Which musicians have most inspired you? Obviously Depressive Silence number amongst them! Equally are there any artists outside the Black Metal and Dungeon Synth genres that influence you?

Narghaash : 'As I mentioned, at first I am really inspired by Summoning and Burzum and of course Depressive Silence. The obscureness of Depressive Silence's songs is very horrifying and beautiful at the same time. Anyway I'm inspired by Dolch, Wengraven, Die verbannten Kinder Evas (Awesome Summoning side project), Alortis (the early stuff) . Outside the Black Metal and Dungeon Synth genres I really like Ulver's electronic stuff and Neofolk. That inspires me, too.'

Mithrim Records : An interest in Germanic heathenism is apparent through the imagery and language of much of your work. Can you talk about your interest in this tradition?

Narghaash : 'Yes, Germanic heathenism is a very important part in my work. It was one of my first inspirations I had. I wanted to make music like Burzum's prison albums: Inspired by Norse mythology and very minimal but with a huge atmosphere in it. Sometimes I read old Norse tales in the Edda and make songs about them. I think you have to keep the knowledge about these old tales alive, they are an important part of culture in my opinion.'

Mithrim Records : Thank you for taking the time to answer these enquiries. After 'Durch Wälder depressiver Stille' is released what does the future hold for Narghaash?

Narghaash : 'I'm looking forward to make another Split with Godocide, I made some Burzum cover songs which are included in Godocide's Burzum tribute album and I want to release the first full length demo which will be called "Dungeons of Darkness" in the future.'

What does the fan say?

Before you ask, yes that is a Elvis reference!

So, why am I making it?

"What does the fan say?" is a new segment I'm introducing to this magazine – so that it's not all band interviews and album reviews!

I'm very fortunate to be one of the admins of the Dungeon Synth page on Facebook (which I'd strongly recommend checking out here : <https://www.facebook.com/DarkMedievalAmbient>). And as a result I have access to a large number of dungeon synth fans.

And so, in this segment I'm going to ask all those dungeon synth listeners to answer a question about a dungeon synth-related topic of my choosing. This could be anything from their opinion on a certain band, a movement, a kind of fan behaviour, etc...

The question asked this week was ;

**What do you think about vocals
in dungeon synth?**

The response I got from the fans was passionate and humbling, and I am truly in debt to them! Most of them will be especially thanked later. But for now, let's hear what they had to say ;

"I enjoy it sometimes it can be great an add to the atmosphere But it has to be done right Or it could end up ruining what could be a Good song"

-Nick Conley

"I like the pompous vocals in Wengraben."

-Anonymous

"No. Whilst I'm not overly bothered if vocals are used well (for example whispered vocals or samples vocals), the music should really be able to speak for itself without needing a human voice. If the artist still wants to add atmosphere then a physical release with an old parchment style inlay would be much more suitable."

- Sean Gregory

"Dungeon Synth is just instrumental music. And not only this: it's raw synth/midi music, that's all.

If you add vocals to dungeon synth, it's not dungeon synth anymore. I don't care about genres or sound limitations to enjoy music, but at least, it's necessary to know the limits when it comes to.

There are a lot of other ambient/instrumental kinds of music out there and Dungeon Synth is a strict style. Call it limited by definition, maybe...If you use VST real sound to make Dungeon Synth, maybe the name would be Dungeon VST."

- Anonymous

"In my honest opinion, vocals are necessary, when they're necessary. If pure music is not enough, for example. Maybe growls would be good."

-Anonymous

"Me personally I'd like to hear more varied vocals in the genre, maybe some growling or chanting. The whisper style just isn't my favorite but that's just my opinion."

-Anonymous

"Vocals do and could make an incredibly valuable addition to Dungeon Synth: be it in a somewhat epic chorus in the vein of Summoning or in a more ritual, chanted way, akin to Blood of the Black Owl's Caller of the Spirits or White Ring's IXC999, vocal lines can add a unique spin on an already abused synth line.

Now, I'm not an advocate for a total conversion of the genre. I'm talking about two or three songs per LP, tastefully integrated with the theme and mood of the album (maybe a summoning ritual? slave chants?), not necessarily intelligible. It could be a whole new sub-genre worthy exploring, given we don't refuse to leave our pre-conceived stances on DS."

-Mattia de Franceschi

"I'm quite a fan of an authoritative spoken voice, for example like that used by Mortis on 'Keiser...'. Narration, even in a foreign tongue, can add an extra layer to the music."

-Anonymous

"Actually, I really think it does depend on the story of the track and ofc. on the artist. For example, a good friend of mine has his own DS project called Narghaash. He does vocals sometimes too and it really does enhance the storytelling of his tracks. But for some tracks you don't really got to have vocals, sometimes they might even be too distracting to the listener.

Burzum had some really nice Dungeon Synth tracks WITHOUT vocals and they are just as good as other tracks with vocals, because the atmosphere works.

So in other words, Vocals are nice for some tracks, but aren't nice for some other tracks. At the end of the day, it's really just up to the artist himself to include vocals or not."

-Tobias Mützel

(Leader of German Ambient/DS/Black Metal solo project Godocide)

"Vocals are usually nice in DS. Check out Erebus, Voices of Winds, Wojnar and many others. I think, that's what modern dungeon synth is missing. But if you can't make proper narrations/screaming vocals, you better don't."

-Eugeny Kleynosov

(admin of Russian VK DS community)

"Vocals can be necessary in the conveying of certain concepts and elements of story telling that instruments themselves can not. Atmosphere should always come first, but if the lyrics are what comes, instead of the music element, then I would say that in certain contexts they work well and others they don't; summoning is a perfect example of where they work well, because their using them in the story telling aspect but it doesn't hurt the music. On the other hand if it's just some one adding vocals to a song that shouldn't need them, then their musical element must be lacking, for a true dungeon synth work shouldn't need them in the first place."

~Vladimir Muspelheim

"For me personally it diversifies from artist to artist. Some know how to create a great atmosphere and then they destroy it with their vocals but in the other hand you can find boring instrumentals that become masterpieces because of the vocals."

-Robert Bekić

"Erebus did a cool thing with vocals in 'Diasia of the Evil Incantations' - the song wouldn't be as good without them!"

-Anonymous

"I believe Vocals in Dungeon Synth are like pictures in a book. With just the instrumental, your imagination fuels the story of the song, vocals are a more direct approach to story telling in music. However, vocals in Dungeon Synth are quite uncommon, but now that I think about it, whenever vocals have been used, it has been really effective. For example, the short verse in The Stars Reflect An Ancient Magic from Lord Lovidicus is fantastic. So I guess it really depends on the song, and how the artist wants the song to be heard."

-Jim

"In my opinion the pertinence of vocals in DS depends on type of vocals and the atmosphere of album. For example Wojnar's vocals are awesome and make his music more epic and atmospheric. But there are projects like Erang, the highlight of which is the music and the vocals can make them worse."

-Denis Skovorodnikov a.k.a Halfgaar (admin of Russian vk.com DS community)

"I think it's possible to add a kind of vocals to the music. But only a few spoken or whispered words. That sounds great and can be very useful to create a more intensive atmosphere in some cases. But mainly DS is an instrumental genre."

-Jan-Erik Schäfer

"Dungeon Synth is about fantasy/otherworldliness, something that is told through stories. If the music itself is a story, then someone verbally telling a story accompanied by music is perfectly fine. Though I should say, I do like the obscured vocals of Cernunnos Woods or Dolch more than a clear voice on a DS recording."

-Anonymous

"Profanum did a great job with synth and vocals."

-Anonymous

Thank you to all who gave their opinions for this new segment! I have been awed by the fantastic response I received. If you didn't know about the "What does the fan say?" section in time for this issue, do not despair! You can still contribute to the debate for the next issue (on subgenres of dungeon synth) here :

<https://www.facebook.com/DarkMedievalAmbient/posts/760617080618919>

Review of “The Bard’s Tale”

“The Bard’s Tale” is an album released in October 2013, by an enterprising dungeon synth act Lord Vladimir Muspelheim (there’s a lot of Lords in our community aren’t there?) It is an album with an obvious inspiration from video game music, from the MIDI soundtracks of old platform and simpler RPG games. The album art itself is even a homage to the simple text-based maps that used to comprise old fantasy video games.

You can download the album for free on bandcamp : <http://lordvladimirmuspelheim.bandcamp.com/album/the-bards-tale>

As I do not know much else about the album, let’s commence with the song-by-song!

01. Deep Within The Necroment’s Lair

From the very first track, we can tell that this album is pretty much going to be a video game soundtrack. Not that there’s anything wrong with that! The music in itself is inspiring.

Starting out with a two-note riff played on a horn or oboe (which is a drone throughout most of the piece), the song quickly develops into more and varied melodies – with other brass parts coming in to lend their support.

This song is dominated by somewhat low-fi brass instruments. It is very well composed – taking a handful of musical themes and varying them with rich and intricate harmonies, inverting the melodies until they sound entirely different. To me, this is the hallmark of a great composer, and Lord Muspelheim is certainly showcasing this here.

What is perhaps most impressive to me is that in some sections of this song the drone is present when it is not present. Its presence is signified by the notes that are played by the other instruments, and that gives the two-note drone a kind of undead presence which is amazing and inspiring compositionally.

While the trumpets and horns certainly have a regal air to them, the song still maintains an element of dark forboding which its title would imply.

It is well-varied in ways beyond mood. Although it suffers from the problems that some MIDI-reliant music suffers from in that the dynamics are largely dictated by texture, with each instrument playing at similar volumes, “Deep Within The Necroment’s Lair” changes things up a lot with tempo and note duration, among other things.

There are dark moments, there are exciting fanfares. There are themes that repeat, and some that fade from memory altogether.

However, I must confess that I notice the precise nature of this piece. By which I mean to say that there is little echo and continuation – when an instrument stops playing, it immediately comes to a halt. There is not even a second or less of reverb which might make this recording sound more realistic. When there are many instruments playing this is not a problem – but in the sections where the trumpet plays on its own, it does make the piece feel a bit broken, and reminds me a bit of its more digital aspects.

Furthermore, the fact that this song is entirely played on brass instruments is a bit perturbing at times. While I like brass instruments, they are perhaps not appropriately suited to conveying the wide variety of moods that this song calls for. If some of the lines (in particular the lines which are made to accompany the main melody) were played on other synths, maybe strings or harps or flutes, the piece might have a more varied feel to it in terms of its tone.

Nevertheless, this is a brilliant start to the album. “Deep Within The Necroment’s Lair” is a song with huge compositional worth, and it most successfully bridges the gap between music that can fade into the background, and music that is immediate and interesting to listen to on its own.



02. Tension

No prizes for guessing what this piece will sound like!

Starting off with a single note played very low-register on a double bass to keep the beat (played very quietly also), the piece is largely silent until two string sections come in to play corresponding chord melodies. They have parallel movement for most of the first section of this piece. The two high-register strings move with the same intervals, while the double bass below them plays sustained notes as accompaniment.

This piece certainly addresses the dynamics problem of the first track – the different strings play noticeably different volumes at different points in the song. The problem was that it was just strings. Much like the first track, the lack of instrumental variation did harm this piece somewhat.

I also noticed that the composition was perhaps a bit more lacking. The first section relied on melodic themes that repeated a little too often and which simply didn't carry the same gravitas they were supposed to. This first section (call it a chorus, if you like) repeats again towards the end of the piece.

Honestly, I just didn't feel like this piece lived up to its title. It wasn't very tense at all. In part I feel this is due to the MIDI aspects of it. Like the first track on this album, "Tension" was very noticeably a MIDI piece. Again, I like MIDI, but when it is all choppy like it is here it does detract from the mood a little. And it looks a bit goofy. It's a bit hard to feel the tension rising in your gut from hearing these melodies, when at the end of every riff you can picture a guy hunched over a computer tapping away at note values and lengths.

Still, some might enjoy it. That's just my opinion after all. But I felt this one was a bit too ambitious – it had too much presence to function as background music, yet wasn't captivating enough to stand on its own.

Anyway...

03. The Long Hard Journey

The brass is back! This song started out in a manner so similar to the first track, that I actually had to check to see if they weren't the exact same note on the same synth. While they weren't, the similarity is profound and unsettling, Especially considering how much I admired the composition on the first track.

A single horn (or other similar instrument) begins this piece, playing a melody which is seemingly through-composed. Other brass instruments then join in to accompany the horn and provide harmonies. These are nice and interesting to listen to. Nonetheless, I do feel as if this piece would be better suited to background music than much else.

This piece also has more instrumental variation than any of the others. One of the synths, which plays in a very high register, is either an organ or flute. Regardless, it certainly makes a nice change, even if it is in the same kind of range.

Listening to this piece certainly does convey the message one would expect from the title. But not in a bad way! I can picture a slow walk through the countryside listening to this, or through a magical forest. Especially with all the different parts intertwining with their own contrapuntal roles; I can just picture goblins and faeries and all manner of forest creatures foraging about their own lives around me as I make my journey to this song.

While I criticized this piece for sounding too akin to the first on this album, it does have a similar level of compositional flair, which is most admirable. There are layered sections, fast-moving sections, and a great variety of moods are conveyed.

Albeit, with the same instrumentation as before...

Particularly towards the end of this piece, I feel a sense of closure. The ending feels like the song has reached its destination, at the end of the long hard journey. After the sombre section preceding it, with a single horn playing a very sombre and repetitive line, the final section of "The Long Hard Journey" is much more balanced and triumphant. There are many harmonies and a great deal more movement. Spread out over a range of octaves, the ending to this piece makes one listen.

Whereas before this piece sounded more like background music, by the end one is really inclined to listen to the melodies. A real turnaround in that regard, although overall I must confess to not liking this song.

04. A Bard's Tale

Again, the horns... But I shouldn't bemoan this for too long! The horns only serve to give a dramatic introduction to the song, with two trumpets playing a majestic yet mysterious theme. These then gives way to two lower-register horns, which play a simpler melody, merely an accompaniment to the star of this piece.

In due course, they are superceded by a dulcimer. I was won over to loving the album by this dulcimer. It moves with incredible grace between the different sections. It plays a kind of solo. A very technical bit to play, very much like a guitar solo in black metal. Despite its complex and fast-paced nature, the dulcimer in this song still manages to grab and maintain the listener's attention.

After this more elaborate display, the brass make a triumphant return. They dominate the following section, the dulcimer only chirping in the odd note or two.

The final section of this piece is marked by a union of the dulcimer and brass. At first they play identical, slow-moving lines. Then the brass carries on in an accompaniment, while the dulcimer echoes its previous illustrious glory. The melody it plays is outstandingly enchanting, and it made me drastically rethink how I felt about this album.

A brilliant work of art! Moreover, the use of the dulcimer really invoked the romance and grandeur of bardom. Listening to those intricate tunes I can almost picture playing them myself as a Medieval bard wandering through the land, perhaps as part of a great saga telling of my life, which has not yet reached its conclusion.

05. A Bard's Tale Part II

That conclusion would be here. It did strike me as rather odd that Lord Muspelheim would have the second part of "A Bard's Tale" follow immediately after the first – usually the storytelling of an album leaves some pause between the two parts – otherwise what is the point of separate parts?

One might ask what the point of "A Bard's Tale Part II" is. With very similar structure and instrumentation (yes, the same brass and dulcimer as before), the whole song is merely a slight variation on its predecessor. Some of the melodies are in fact exactly the same!

It struck me as very lazy and uninspired songwriting. There is not even a change in instrumentation, and while there are some variations on the initial themes, it doesn't justify a whole song being devoted to them! Even the beautiful structure of the dulcimer and brass was totally wasted on me at this point – its scintillating atmosphere was tossed aside by my annoyance at being presented with the same song again, just in a slightly different package.

"A Bard's Tale Part II" doesn't start from where "A Bard's Tale" left off, it doesn't add anything more and it says nothing by restating the initial melodies. It's just a cheap filler and I hate it!

06. Glandring the Foe Hammer!

Confusing. Honestly. This song follows in the vein of the two previous tracks on the album (which were fairly short), in that it is short, yet suitably varied so as not to be boring. Much like "A Bard's Tale", this song is certainly not background music.

But for a song that's about a hammer, one might imagine "Glandring the Foe Hammer" would be a tad more percussive. There is little attack throughout the whole piece. It starts out with two synths playing in a melody/accompaniment fashion. With the same jerky motion as before, this piece at many points stops dead and sounds like it is over, only to reappear a few seconds later with no warning or suitable introduction.

07. As Fargorth Fought For His Life

Woowoooo! Not Fargorth! I liked that elf...

This song's automatically going to be score a lot of points with me 'cause of the Morrowind reference. But it doesn't need the reference to gain my affection at all. "As Fargorth Fought For His Life" is the most varied pieces on this album, with a wide variety of instruments (strings, brass and harp). Also, in terms of composition, it takes the brilliance of "Into The Necroment's Lair", and embellishes it even more!

This is one of the least digital-sounding pieces on the album. I could be saying this due to my preference for strings over brass instruments, as they have a much greater presence here. They make this song to me sound much more Medieval than many of the ones before it – I do not feel like I am playing a computer game at all, but rather that I am actively experiencing the world of Morrowind myself (just to give an example, because of the reference!)

At the beginning, two different stringed instruments share the main melody in a fascinating call-and-response fashion. The brass enters in periodically, in a very sincere yet bombastic fashion heightening the tension in this piece.

There is also a percussive line here, unheard of in the rest of the album. It marks the beginning of the second section – a single bass drum which knocks out a repetitive rhythm accompanied only by a mournful cello. While sombre, this section is also very dramatic, and perhaps depicts the more tenacious moments of a fight between Fargorth and his killer.

This accompaniment is brief – the drama of the drums and the cello soon give way to the tragedy of strings playing on their own. A very beautiful melody here, that really moves you.

I nearly cried – it felt like Fargorth had genuinely died. I may need to head back to Seyda Neen again to see whether he is really OK.

Final Thoughts : *Although in this review I bitched a lot about how I felt this album sounded too digital, and was in some ways uninspired, I must state that this did not largely detract from my enjoyment of the album. I had listened to it multiple times beforehand and LOVED it – all of these criticisms only came out when I sat down with pen and paper, and listened to it critically with a view towards writing a review.*

A lot of the songs showcase excellent songwriting ability on the part of Lord Muspelheim. The pieces are moving, with great variations in mood and great flexibility between the role of background and foreground music. Most of the album has great atmosphere which really draws the audience away into a fantasy land, with moving melodies as well.

You readers may be surprised by this, giving how critical I was in the review, but I would rate "A Bard's Tale" (the album) 4 out of 5 and would definitely recommend it to all the readers of Dungeons of Darkness!

-Levi Talvi

Dungeon Synth Patches

We at Dungeons of Darkness are pleased to inform you that an enterprising Russian has made some dungeon synth patches which are now going on sale! As you can see down below, they contain patches from the Dungeon Lore Foundation, Mortuis, and others!

For more information on prices and shipping, simply email: vk.dungeonsynth@gmail.com



Interview with Fear Through Eternity



Fear Through Eternity is a revolutionary new audio-visual project by Merdumgiriz. It is an exciting new venture combining ambient music and film, and Dungeons of Darkness is delighted to have had the pleasure of interviewing them!

You can find their website and download their material here (and I would certainly encourage you all to do so!);

<http://merdumgiriz.org/FTCE2013/hgrJSDvuaDQKCEIWMenMQBaNeKLiOSnVq.html>



Lebi :

Tell us a little about your musical background.

Merdumgiriz ;

Parents used to play Simon & Garfunkel, Cat Stevens, Pink Floyd, Scorpions, Barbra Streisand, Vivaldi records (all of which I now like very much) and such over and over and over again against my will so its safe to say that those types of things are among my main musical foundations. Then someday, I remember seeing Metallica's Unforgiven II on TV and saying, "This is it". After which point I started listening to everything hard rock and punk I could get my hands on, which was not a lot of things given my age and location. At the same time I started getting into rave music, which was becoming somewhat accessible through the likes of The Prodigy. Then my family moved to New York for a couple of months when I was 11 and by the sheerest chance I got my hands on three black/death metal records by Venom, Acheron and Bathory. After which point I started getting into darker and more obscure music while slowly purchasing musical gear, teaching myself how to play and produce.

Lebi :

How did you get into film? And where did you go to shoot those amazing videos?

Merdumgiriz :

I remember being utterly bored and uninterested in virtually everyone and everything until I started seeing life through exercising and experiencing art. I started drawing and painting at age seven and took it very seriously. I studied it until I was 11 -atelier style.

Soon after, I got myself into video art and creative writing. Finally at age 14 I bought a guitar and got into playing music. By age 15 I figured, I needed to be involved with something that combines all these things that I liked doing which then got me into filmmaking. Though I am practicing many different forms of art nowadays, I have principally seen myself as a filmmaker ever since. The outdoors locations in Fear Through Eternity are in Pamrun – Turkey. The main castle is Lampron Castle's upper ward. The one in the very end is the gate at the western wall of Sinap Castle.

Lebi :

What are your inspirations – both musically and visually?

Merdumgiriz ;

Concordant to the last question, art is like a mirror through which everything seems beautiful and meaningful. Like most people, I have grown up to view everything in a very negative way and for the longest time, again like most people thought that maintaining this view to be the only righteous thing to do in this ugly world. Now I am convinced that we are here to suffer and any moment spent without suffering is a malfunction that one must hold on to. Stripping moments from suffering and justifying the future and past through expression are the main ways in which I choose to work out my own salvation. Therefore, everything in this life became an inspiration after I've started carving this path out for myself.

Lebi :

What was it that first motivated you to combine ambient music and film?

Merdunggiriz :

I think and philosophize most effectively when listening to ambient music, without the need of conventional communication forms. A place that music takes and guides me with its magical structures is how I am best able to think creatively. How long sessions of immersing myself in the music of a composition have rendered the narrative in a given work into just another element of that mise en scène for me is another story. However, I've wanted to make films like ambient music for a long time to further this experience and to further deconstruct the concept of narrative (film) in me. But most importantly, through images and audio I've wanted to further my study in a certain metaphysical myth.

Lebi :

You filmed a 37 minute video for "Fear Through Eternity" - which I have to say I rather liked. Tell us a little bit about the process of putting it all together - I imagine it would take a lot of time and effort!

Merdunggiriz :

A sculptor friend and I had been gathering in his house and writing what we would call genesis hypotheses for fun for the past four years. A genesis hypothesis is a fantastic fictionalization on how the universe and time function, much like a theological explanation. One of which I have come up with is called "Forsaken Children Of Evil". I remember wanting to explore it further in moving images and music to carve more out of its essence. After finishing the writing I bought a lot of 16mm B&W film stock, cut them into 100ft batches, boxed them, packed my Bolex Rex-4 and tripod went to Turkey to shoot it in Pamrun. After shooting the outdoors stuff, I went to Canada and shot the interior scenes with an Arri 16SR. After which I processed all of it with two friends of mine in a Kodak Prostar film processor. Then sent it to Technicolor to get it digitized, while composing the soundtrack on synthesizers, recording, mixing and mastering it. Then I put it all together. Overall, it took two years, one of which in waiting for film festivals to reject it.

Lebi :

How has your video been received?

Merdunggiriz :

I like it more that people actually sit through it rather than their positive or negative attention, which it has been getting both. I have yet to experience the pleasure of indulging in thoughtful conversations about it.

I like it when people share their somewhat felt interpretations about, or noteworthy experiences throughout the film. After all, I plant seeds and it is certainly nice to have everybody else's input in making them into forests. I have some ideas on how to make that actually work a lot better in the future. While I am at it, I must point out that I put it online in spite of people watching it on very small screens and shitty sound systems. We have uploaded it in really good quality for people to be able to experience it larger than life. The way to watch this film is through a projector and with huge sound. Interpret, experience and philosophize. Intake of drugs is optional.

Lebi :

Which would you say takes more time and money to record - music or film?

Merdunggiriz :

Simply because I always produce original music for my films, film is ultimately harder. It does not really feel like either one is taking time because I am in a trance while I am making art. To me it's like asking if sex or TV dinner take time, but I am sure that this is because not many people are involved in the process. Moneywise, it really does not cost much because I do most things by myself with the gear I have slowly purchased over the years, even the making of the actual merchandise. To keep this going the way it is in all departments, I try to limit the amount of people interfering with the process. This not only saves time, but also a lot of insignificance and doubt.

Lebi :

Where do you draw your inspiration from?

Merdunggiriz :

The main inspiration is negativity. More than getting inspired by it, I use art to cope with the bothersome interpretations that my mind conjures through life. I know that there are other ways of dealing with them, but this is the way I choose. As many might agree, our existence is absurd and repulsive and we strive to make something out of it while trying not to make it worse. All the while feeling that our only hope in making it better is getting tired of hoping it might get any better. Voices tell us to live now and enjoy life, but we all know that it is impossible unless one is able to find something that would work effectively in his deceiving himself. Mine is art. Having said that, I should point out that if only I could someday free myself from fear, which I find to be the ultimate goal of my (and know it all as it may be, everyone's) existence, then I might as well just appreciate this world and dwell freely in it rather than forcing myself to constantly struggle against the unity of death.

Lebi :

Is there a message you want to convey with your music and videos?

Merdumgiriz :

The initial pulse is certain paths that my inspiration guides me to. Through making work, I walk these paths. Although I have ideas about what kind of journeys they shall prove to be, I never know where they might lead beforehand. My music and images are my road journals, and that is the message. The energies I strive to somewhat channel into my work are not things that I would be able to discuss in a way that would be explanatory. Moreover, I think very lowly of people who try to "understand" the "message" the artist has supposedly infixed. Even lower for so called artists who assumedly attempt to get something across in such manner. In a world where one spends a lifetime trying to understand oneself, I think it's delusional, futile and dull to try to "understand" anything about what comes out of somebody else. I feel that if what one wants to communicate is best explored through art then its source must even be beyond the limits of the artist and perhaps the beholder who might reach even greater heights through the work than the artist.

Luckily, works of art have the means of coming together unlimited despite the shallowness of whoever is making and/or experiencing it. That is above all, why I chose to involve myself with this path, rather than merely trying to suggest a point of view.

Lebi :

Many might consider "Fear Through Eternity" the first music video ever done for the dungeon synth/dark ambient genre! I certainly can't think of another! So, congratulations on that front. Do you think this is a trend that others might copy?

Merdumgiriz :

As far as music videos go, there has been one for "Reisene Til Grotter Og Odemarken" by Mortis, which was a major stylistic influence on "Fear Through Eternity". It is this video that, after watching I have told myself that something like this had to be shot and made into an actual film. Some time later, after deciding to study "Forsaken Children Of Evil" into a film, it all made sense to incorporate my interpretation of that style into what I was doing. More than a music video, I think "Fear Through Eternity" came together as a film, and in that sense it might have its moments in the pioneering side of things. I am really not sure if it would become a trend but I would love to see something that I might like influenced by my work.

Lebi :

Which is more important to you in your work. The visuals or the music?

Merdumgiriz :

I consider myself to be more of a filmmaker than a musician, but none of them are more important than the other. Music gives a more immediate joy that requires you to participate while visual art gives a longer lasting and more guided joy I find. Cinema however gives the most ritualistic and vastest joy, but it is at the same time not as immediate or ergonomic as the other ones. One cannot experience high quality visual work through a compact system yet, which enables people to carry their art along. Like one has to go to a gallery but can listen to music through everyday life. When it comes to making work, I do get a pharmaceutical effect from making music whereas I get a therapeutic effect from cinema. Both are good depending on discomfort.

Lebi :

Do you think your album can stand on its own, or does it require the visual component to come into its own?

Merdumgiriz :

I think that if it does or doesn't really depend on the viewer. My opinion is that it already stands on its own to the extent that I released it as a Napla album. I certainly would not offer it separate from its visual counterpart if I somehow felt that it absolutely needed it. But then again, I have grown up dubbing dos-game music to tape on loops to be able to fall asleep on. I also used to print enlarged paintings and photographs to cut out certain parts of them for reframing the work. I still fancy listening to overlapping background music over people talking in cafés. Therefore, my understanding of the wholeness of a piece is quite loose and I can and more often than do deconstruct and reconstruct on the spot without much need for how something has been put together to get what I want. In that sense, maybe I am not to say if one who might need this can actually get it from the soundtrack alone.

Lebi :

Where can our readers find your work? And any last words to say to our readers?

Merdumgiriz :

We have a label called Merdumgiriz where hand-made copies of all my work can be ordered through: www.merdumgiriz.org. Thank you Lebi for your interest and challenging me with these great questions. Keep up the good work with Dungeons of Darkness. Whoever is truly interested in my work, expect more and new.

Sword-And-Sorcery Stuff

Since last edition I talked about the Gothic video game series for this segment, this issue I thought I'd talk about an old animated TV series with a fantasy theme.

This is quite an old one, and in many ways is cringe-worthy. I probably only watch and love it for the nostalgia value, but it is part of my childhood and adult life and I love it!

The show I am talking about in particular is Xcalibur. Nope, not "Excalibur", Xcalibur. It's cooler that way! Though I'm pretty sure they did that just to avoid copyright issues with similarly named shows... Then again, the show was made in a French-speaking part of Canada, so the odd spelling may be a linguistic expression.

Be that as it may, the show itself is pretty awesome!

SPOILER ALERT!

It is set in a Medieval fantasy land. The king Edwin rules over the land, until he is killed by his brother, Prince Bragan. Another prince, Erwin, carries out the King's final requests, and hides the Sword of Justice (Xcalibur) in a safe place. Sometime afterwards the devil (who views the sword as the only real threat to his dominion) casts a spell on Erwin, turning him to stone.

All this is witnessed by his daughter, Princess Djana. She befriends a young shogi apprentice named Herik (the shogis are like a society of sorcerers) who has been entrusted with the Book of Life (a magical book containing all the knowledge of the shogi people). Together they retrieve the sword of justice, with the intent on bringing it before the young prince Arthas (son of the recently deceased King Edwin).

However, upon arriving at the palace they discover that Edwin's assassin (Bragan) has assumed control over the land as Regent, until the young Arthas is of suitable age to rule the Kingdom.

Bragan convinces Arthas and the council that Djana's father (Prince Erwin) killed King Edwin and stole the Sword of Justice. Unable to convince the council or the young Prince, Djana and Herik are forced to go on the run and become outlaws – Djana vows to wield the Sword of Justice, and use it for good until Arthas is old enough to wield it himself.

Shortly afterwards, the pair team up with a barbarian (though they prefer to be called 'people of the sea') and together they journey throughout the land, righting the wrongs caused by Bragan due to his alliance with the Devil.

So that's a basic summary of the plot.

Obviously, it is intended as a children's show. I know that. But one thing people don't realize about 90's (although this was released in 2001) shows is that even children's shows were a great deal more deep and mature than they are today. Xcalibur has many elements which would appeal to an adult audience. The plot itself is riveting – there are many questions raised about the characters throughout, and each is explored adequately and given a full story.

One facet of the plot which is explored in great detail is Princess Djana's reliance on the power of Xcalibur. Xcalibur is a magical sword that can cut through rocks, smash other swords and knock people aside with a mere incantation to call on its power. It's pretty much stated by some characters in the series that Djana would be a totally useless fighter if she didn't have this incredibly powerful weapon to back her up.

Although she proves herself many times as being capable both of fighting and problem-solving without the Sword of Justice, the fear of being weakened without it still cripples the heroine, and this becomes a major plot device in the show. In a very Lord-of-the-Rings style thing, Djana herself becomes corrupted by a desire for the power that Xcalibur gives her, and almost turns evil herself as a result.

That's just one example that I particularly like. I also enjoyed how many of the plot devices were explored philosophically and emotionally rather than through violence. It's far too common in modern writing for characters to undergo character development, only when they've experienced some devastating physical loss – the loss of a loved one, defeat in battle, loss of

possessions, etc... But the characters in Xcalibur actively reflect on their own beliefs and practises, before losing anything and sometimes before any action has even occurred. This to me is the mark of very intelligent and mature storytelling.

It is a surprisingly complex plot – especially for a children’s show. It is also very cerebral. What stands out is the continuity. Regrettably there is a trend in many shows nowadays to have single-episode plots, which are entirely self-contained, and the events in one episode rarely reoccur or have implications for the rest of the plot. This is not true at all here – familiar places and tertiary characters and magical items continually reappear and are used in different contexts and stories. The changes to these are consistent also – if a town is burned down, it does not magically spring back to life the next episode!

Furthermore, this show is brilliant in terms of representation. Xcalibur easily passes the Bechdel test (as 2 out of the 3 main characters are female), and it is one of the few fantasy shows to have practical female armour. Except for this weird little diamond shaped patch of exposed skin over the Princess’s chest, which I never quite understood... Women in this series are not portrayed in any stereotypical manner at all (if anything, the gender roles are somewhat reversed ; all the “muscle” in the three main characters are women, the third person is a shogi monk who, although able to defend himself, is primarily a thinker and not a fighter).

There are, however, some issues with it being European fantasy, But I personally like European fantasy, and they don’t have any negative or stereotypical portrayals of minorities in real life, and there are dark-skinned peoples in the series...

The romance in the show is also surprisingly convoluted and touches on some very dark themes for a children’s show. It is heavily implied that Tara (the barbarian who assists Princess Djana) is mainly helping because she is in love with Djana’s father, and wants to help her undo the curse that turned him to stone.

To make matters even more confusing – it is later implied that Tara may also be Herik’s mother (although this is disproven later in the series, it is known that Tara did have a relationship with Herik’s father). And Herik and Djana are shown as the main couple in the show.

Yeah, twisted...

Although the animation may appear outdated now, bear in mind that this was made over ten years ago – and at the time this was considered quite impressive. For some reason there are rarely very many characters on screen. When guards are summoned at the various castles and villages, there are very rarely more than three of them present at any one time.

The voice acting is quite good also, except for the Devil being a bit over-the-top at times. At first I thought this was a limitation of the CGI they had in the day – but in one episode there are over ten soldiers in an “army” at one point – if not more. So perhaps it’s a deliberate move. After all, population sizes were much smaller in those days...

The Devil is one of the only real flaws in this show. While the morality of other characters are questioned throughout the series (even the Devil’s henchman, Bragan), the Devil himself is always shown until the very end as being pure evil with no motivation being explained.

There are also some issues with fairly obvious colour-coding (the good guys are in lighter colours, whereas the baddies are always in dark purple – although this was the colour of royalty, so that may be an explanation).

Furthermore, the soundtrack to this series is awesome! It is really great ambient music, with a wide variety of pieces to reflect different moods within the series. The instrumentation is lovely also – with beautiful Medieval sounds being used. Harps, violins, brass and dulcimers all weave together in the soundtrack to make amazing atmosphere.

And, at the start of every episode, after the theme song (it’s not your typical corny theme song either, just a really rousing instrumental piece), there is a small piece of dungeon synth music played while the title of the episode is displayed – a new one for each song! It’s these little tidbits that make the show so enjoyable!

But despite these flaws, the show is of excellent quality and writing, and I think anyone with a passion for sword-and-sorcery should check it out! Luckily you can find all the episodes on Youtube, just type in “Xcalibur”, and you’ll find it soon enough. They’re great fun to watch. I myself have downloaded the entire series. Shame there was only one...

-Levi Talbi

Review of “Kyndill og Steinn”

Of course, we couldn't have a dungeon synth magazine without some mention of Lord Lovidicus! In 2013 he released a new album, “Kyndill og Steinn”, which means “Torch and Stone” in Icelandic. It was released on Mithrim Records through Bandcamp, and you can download it here: <http://mithrimrecords.bandcamp.com/album/kyndill-og-steinn>

Not only that, but there is also going to be a physical release, which will be made some time in early 2014! Very exciting news.

So we should really hear what all the fuss is about. On with the song-by-song review!



01. The Marauding Passage

This starts off with a massive crash cymbal, which I feel is far too loud and cacophonous for my tastes. While it does add a lot of drama and tension to this piece (perhaps making it more in line with the ominous title), and it does become less noticeable as other instruments create a thicker texture later on and thereby increase the volume, earlier on and during the quieter parts of this song, the cymbal does prove to be rather annoying.

To me, anyway.

It starts off with some rather symphonic strings, drowned as they are by the cymbals. Shortly afterwards a dulcimer (or acoustic guitar?) comes in and plays a separate melody on top of it.

After this a whole plethora of different synths join in and add their voices to

the song. The melodies themselves are rather peaceful, and they ride through a variety of different emotions each time.

At times, the gentle strings and bouncing dulcimer/harp melodies sound almost angelic, and then those are masterfully shattered by the fantastic brass and other instruments which totally take over the mood of the song at those points.

Some of the riffs (particularly those played on more percussive synths) are quite dainty, with a little more speed and flair than one might normally expect from dungeon synth.

There are a few themes that repeat, but they are always suitably varied, and there are many new riffs introduced at various points in the song, to the extent that at a first glance one might assume “The Marauding Passage” to be through-composed. It's a brilliantly written song overall, and a great start to the album!

02. Deciphering Scorched Parchment Neath Torchlight

Simple enough, the intro. A few percussive instruments (I can't quite tell, but they sound like some variety of stringed instruments, and some of them are plucked) all play simultaneously, with various melodies and harmonies expressed. The melodies are nice enough, but in all honesty are a bit generic, and nothing about them particularly grabs me. They are developed nicely – I can't fault Crow there at all. But none of it really speaks to me at all...

In terms of mood this song seems to oscillate between periods of drama and adventure, and quieter periods of relative tranquillity and reflection. Sometimes there is a sort of crescendo both of volume and of the tension between these two phrases of the song, as it were.

These devices start to bore me fairly quickly (again – this is just my own perspective – maybe I'm being a bit harsh because I'm writing this review quite late at night), as the same themes undergo variation while shifting between those two all-too-familiar moods and atmospheres. I didn't really enjoy this song.

03. Fog of the Autumnal Forest

This song starts off in a manner most fitting for its title – with a cymbal breaking us into very faint and distant strings. Soon enough, they are joined by other synths, much in the fashion of the previous two songs.

However, I have to say that this does nothing for me. Mainly because this song is too well-written.

What are you talking about, Levi?

Bear in mind, as usual, that this is just how I interpret the music – I could be entirely wrong. Others may disagree. Being that as it may...

Well, I feel like this song has a lot in common with classical music – only a few melodies are repeated, if at all, and those that are are developed significantly, almost to the point of being unrecognizable. The end result for me is that I walk away from the piece not remembering any of the melody. The moods also change a lot – although I am left with the impression of this being a more upbeat song. Everything about this song – the melody, the atmosphere, it's as if it passes by and leaves no imprint on me.

Like a fog...

04. Crystalline Fountains of Vitality

A very sombre and ambient piano starts off this song. The melody repeats on in a beautiful dirge. It is hauntingly simple – in some ways like "Illa Tíðlandi" on Burzum's first ambient album. The lone piano is then joined by a choir, which provides accompaniment.

That is for the first section.

While the piano plays in a dirge throughout, different sections in this song are marked by the introduction of various other instruments. After about twenty seconds, the relative tranquillity of the piano and choir is shattered by the introduction of some very electronic-sounding percussion. This comes and goes in various sections of the song.

I've got to say – the fact that the piano keeps on playing the same riff in a dirge is a very refreshing change from the previous song, where there was no definitive melody one could latch on to or remember. The melody which the piano plays over and over is sophisticated enough that its repetition does not diminish its beauty.

There is also beautiful contrast between the different moods in the song. The sections are either sombre and ominous, or upbeat and happy. And all this with the same melody! It's achieved by the use of different instruments in different parts of the song.

These different instruments take and develop the initial piano theme into all sorts of beautiful new forms, yet one can still listen to them and know that they came from the same place. It's simply genius songwriting!

Atmosphere is also very well-employed in this song. Some of the sombre passages are incredibly moving!

Also, the instrumentation is quite brilliant. Aside from the piano and drums, there are obviously a wide variety of other instruments playing at various points in this piece. This album in general has songs with very thick texture, and "Crystalline Fountains of Vitality" is no exception. There are so many instruments which feature in this song, too many to list and place.

One last touch which made me absolutely enamoured with this song was the very crystalline...I don't know what it was. There was some synth that was used with a BEAUTIFUL crystalline sound, fitting in precisely with the song title. Amazing!

05. Majestic Temple of Engraved Fluorspar Crystals

With this piece, Crow breaks the trend in this album thus far of thick textures and complex melodic development. "Majestic Temple of Engraved Fluorspar Crystals" begins with a simple strings line, over which a harp-like instrument soon plays a repetitive dirge with a single beat for accompaniment.

While other instruments are added at various points during this song, they are less pronounced than in previous songs, and they are usually not all present at the same time.

I do take issue with some of these other instruments, however. I felt that a lot of the synths (and especially the percussion) sounded far too digital – it reminded me of SO's synth music. And who wants any of that?

But that was only one part of the song. Eventually the section with those disgusting SO's sounding synths dies out. It is replaced by a more ambient section with a beautiful combination of a brass and flute melody that just fit so perfectly together. Brass instruments in general are quite good for giving off a feeling of majesty. Also, in this section the very artificial percussion is reduced to a very simple hit on every beat.

It returns, however. Later on. No me gusta.

This song could make fairly decent background music – and I actually see its potential as video game music also. In particular, the SO's synth sounds wouldn't feel so misplaced as part of a video game soundtrack. However, I'm not sure how I feel about this piece as foreground music. Parts of it have brilliant atmosphere and beautiful melodies, while others have poor instrumentation and empty melodies that seem to drag on forever. I really cannot make up my mind here...

06. In The Court Of The Crypt Lord

A harpsichord (at least I think that's what it is) introduces the first melody in this song. It plays on in a very creepy dirge. It is accompanied by choirs and strings and brass for a brief period, before it BURSTS out into an explosive toe-tapping melody. This much faster tune greatly raises the tension in this piece.

The brass too, is an excellent addition. Its deeper tone is brilliant at portraying the sinister evil of the crypt Lord.

At about one-and-a-half minutes into the song, it starts to sound very much like an Age of Empires soundtrack. Curious.

Unlike most of the pieces on this album, "In The Court Of The Crypt Lord" has a consistent mood throughout most of its duration (except for that more jovial Age-of-Empires-esque section pertained to earlier). Even in parts of the song with a fast-paced harpsichord melody, the other instruments accompanying it somehow serve to make this piece ominous and brooding. I just love it!

Also the instrumentation is far more palatable. I have no real problems with the tone on any of the instruments. Good call, Crow!

07. Ghost Wind Within The Mist

Perhaps appropriately for this title, this was a piece marked by its very thin texture. I think this works very well – on many songs on this album the whole symphony of instruments can be a bit distracting at times. With all the changing melodies and instruments, sometimes it's unclear what to pay attention to. This piece entirely changes that. It is dominated by a spooky piano with tonnes of reverb (VEED atmospheric).

This piece does a very good job too of stating notes that aren't there. For me, each of the melodies feels like it's leaving out the most important notes, making us fill them in in our heads. It's a brilliant technique in songwriting, that keeps us listening, eager to see whether the tune will ever complete itself.

Listening to this piece, one can really drift away. The piano plays on in a dirge, with the other instruments playing steady accompaniment, for the middle section of the song. On top of this wonderful arrangement a flute plays a melody which isn't attention-grabbing, but that goes off on its own gentle path and leads you along into a trance.

That trance is then finalized with the ending of the piece. The piano and some harp-like instrument plays complimentary melodies until the very end, where the piano dutifully brings the piece to its rest.

This song is one of my favourites on the album. It has great atmosphere, instrumentation and songwriting. The mood is consistent throughout – this piece really sends a message. And the melodies are somewhat memorable also, they stick into your soul. And it achieves all this while still maintaining the level of songwriting sophistication we've seen in all the previous songs!

08. The Cursed Lich

Another atmospheric piece. It seems as if Crow suddenly took notice and started aiming for consistent mood midway through the album. Whatever. I'm not complaining!

There is a lot of bass used in this song – there is always some accompaniment being played in a very low register on this song. It contrasts nicely with the other higher-pitched synths. Having a song spread out over a range of octaves is a great way to instil ambience, I've found. It gives one's music a sort of multi-pronged attack.

I don't know why I think this – but I feel very much like this piece (more so than all the others) is telling a specific story. What that story is, I don't know. But I suspect that all the sections of this song are like chapters of a larger narrative.

As in the last song, the tunes were quite engrossing. There were a lot of them too ; “The Cursed Lich” is quite a long piece, at over eight minutes. In the same vein as the rest of the album, the melodies in this song were vibrant and dynamic, they constantly twisted and adapted themselves into new interesting forms.

After this song takes us to a multitude of different places, it slowly fades out. A very energetic chorus fades to end. The song's ending itself is an impressively written contrast between the energy of the music and its fading volume, testimony to the genius of this song (and the album in general!).

09. Trudging Beneath Snow-Covered Trees

This final song is proof that the 80's style synths do not necessarily always hinder the ambience of a piece. Very angelic string synths, and one harp-like melody begin this song. “Trudging Beneath Snow-Covered Trees” sounds somewhat out-of-place with the rest of Kyndill og Steinn, sounding much more akin to earlier Lord Lovidicus albums like Windbuchen. Largely because the instruments here have less attack and sound more heavenly than most of the other synths on this album.

It's a very refreshing change, actually. And I feel it's an appropriate at the end of a very complicated and varied album. This song gives us a little reflection and meditation after the tumult preceding it.

That doesn't mean this piece doesn't have plenty to offer in and of itself, though! I really love the flute and how it can create some melodies that are bold and enterprising and others that are relaxing and gentle and soothing. It fits in well with the other instruments, particularly because it functions very well as a lead instrument, but is unobtrusive enough that it can allow for other instruments (say the brass) to be heard if their harmonies or melodic developments are important.

And it is the flute which finishes this piece and the album. In the same fashion as “The Cursed Lich”, this last song on the album ends with an energetic chorus that repeats while it fades away.

Final Thoughts : *Although Kyndill og Steinn has many great features, I have to say I did not enjoy it personally. As I said before, this is not in any way due to negligence on the part of the creator. All it is is my personal preference – I just find the music in this album too complex for my tastes. On most of these songs there are so many musical themes which are so thoroughly developed that I finished listening to this album barely remembering any of it. Moreover, I felt that some of the sounds on this album weren't all that conducive to the fantasy atmosphere which is so vital in dungeon synth. So, although I must again note that this album is wonderfully written, I will only rate it 3 out of 5. But this is mostly my own judgement – and I encourage the readers of Dungeons of Darkness to give it a listen and decide for themselves. All the other reviews I've seen of Kyndill og Steinn thus far have been much more positive!*

-Levi Talbi

Credits and Contacts

So here we are at the end of another issue of *Dungeons of Darkness*! It's been an amazing time writing this, and it gives me even more satisfaction knowing someone will read it. I am truly grateful to each and every one of you readers!

And some of you, I know, will have had a role to play in making this magazine. So, let's recognize that!

I'd like to thank *Mithrim Records* for allowing me to feature their interview with *Farghaash*, as well as their flyer for the *Farghaash* cassette tapes!

I'd like to thank our anonymous writer who contributed his review of "*Caverns of Endless*". The readers and I owe you a great debt!

I'd like to thank *Eugene Klein* for producing those brilliant dungeon synth patches and giving me a strip to put in this issue so the readers of *Dungeons of Darkness* can benefit.

Obviously, thank you so much to all the bands and musicians whom I interviewed for this magazine. Your contribution to the second issue of *Dungeons of Darkness* has been invaluable.

Thank you also to the following minions from the *Dungeon Synth* page on Facebook :

- Evan Daniel
- Ross Campbell
- Cody Joyal
- Robert Bekic
- Elliott Hewitt
- El Beardo
- Daniel Valdez
- Maximilian Vontwolfgang
- Cristos Valuta

There are many other supporters too. You all know who you are, and you are amazing people!

One small disclaimer : *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.

Who is this editor, then, and how can you contact them?

That's me.

Hi! I'm *Levi Talvi*. Aside from the aforementioned contributors, I'm the person who wrote and put together everything in this magazine.

I'm pleased to report that there are new and easier ways to contact Dungeons of Darkness and show your support.

We have a page on Facebook now, and I would highly encourage all of our readers to like it. On the page you'll get updates about the progress of future issues of Dungeons of Darkness, and you can write in to us on the page, ask us questions, post bands you would like us to feature, or contact us to arrange an interview!

Go like it here : <https://www.facebook.com/dungeonsofdarknesszine>

And as before, you can email me directly here :

xxxxxxx@hotmail.com

Or you can call/text me with this number :

(+44) 07xxx xxxxxx

A NOTE ABOUT PHYSICAL RELEASES!

I do not know whether or not I will be able to print physical copies of Dungeons of Darkness due to rather turbulent conditions in my life. However, should any of you want to print off a physical copy for yourselves, you have my full permission to take this PDF to any printing place, or to print it in your own homes.

If you wish to send me physical mail, or if circumstances change and I am able to produce physical copies (if that happens, you can find out on the Dungeons of Darkness facebook page), this is the mailing address to use :

xxxxxxx,

London,

England

And now, I hand over to you, our brilliant readers! I want to grow the genre of dungeon synth, and you can all help! Share this magazine, and the Dungeons of Darkness facebook page with your friends, family and coworkers. Make sure we're known. But above all else, I hope you enjoyed this magazine, and I would like to thank you one last time for being a part of this second issue of the first dungeon synth magazine in the world!

-Levi Talvi

