

Dungeons of Darkness

Issue #003



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Editorials

Welcome, new and returning readers to a third issue of Dungeons of Darkness! Again, please accept my apologies that this issue has taken so long to produce - after the release of the second issue I had to start revising for a series of incredibly important exams, which prevented me from working on this issue.

But, in some ways that's a good thing! It's meant that in my long absence plenty of new artists have emerged, and existing artists have released new things. There's been plenty of exciting developments in the dungeon synth genre this year, and I'm most excited to cover them in this issue.

Just a small note regarding physical copies - as some of you who emailed in have found out, I was never able to make physical copies to mail to people. However, as with the last couple of issues, you have my permission to copy and print copies of Dungeons of Darkness for yourself.

One last thing I need to say before we get started with the music, is that these few years are a very important and demanding time in my life. It is because I have had to focus on my education at this critical stage that I have been so slow in producing this third issue of Dungeons of Darkness, and in all honesty it is making me doubt my ability to continue producing magazines once every six months as I had originally planned. Thus, as stated above, Dungeons of Darkness will henceforth be annual.

However, since this issue is long overdue, I added a little extra content to make it longer than the 46 pages of the last two editions. I hope you enjoy it!

Thank you once again for your readership - it means the world to me.

-Levi Talvi

Review of 'The Ways Of Yore'

This year, 2014, Varg Vikernes released a new album under Burzum entitled 'The Ways Of Yore'. On his own website Varg is quoted as saying of the album : "The Ways of Yore" is my first step towards something new, which at the same time is as old as the roots of Europe. With "The Ways of Yore" I try to transport the listener to the days of yore, to make them feel the past, that is still alive in their own blood." Interestingly enough, this quote reminds me very much of the promo to Eluveitie's upcoming album 'Origins'. But that's another matter!

The album art is the painting 'Viviane and Merlin' by Gustave Doré, and it is besmirched with interweaving swastikas which form a square around the couple. When I commented on this before, saying that I felt it was distasteful, people told me I was ignorant of the presence and use of the swastika in European culture and that Varg's use of it here doesn't necessarily imply any sympathies or links with Nazism. I do not deny that the swastika has been used historically, however I feel that considering the history of the Nazis using it, hindus, heathens and any other religious or non-religious people should refrain from using it where possible. And I feel that its use here, and in most other places where it is found in the present day, is unnecessary. The swastika is not a symbol which so heavily permeated the heathen world as did Mjøltnir, or as heavily as the Christian cross found its way into all corners of Christendom. While it existed as a motif, it was not a symbol of great importance or frequent use - at least from what I have noticed looking at old texts and archaeological finds online. This, in addition to Varg's acknowledged and proud racism leads me to believe that he is using the symbol here as a symbol of his 'aryan pride'.



It's not a huge deal, just a little blemish really. It's a reminder of the racism which unfortunately permeates the black metal, dungeon synth and Early music communities (that's something I'll get on to later).

The lyrical themes and titles of the songs, in keeping with Burzum's last three albums, are heavily centred around Norse mythology (for examples, songs entitled 'Heill Odinn', 'Heill Freyja' and 'The Coming of Etains'). I was pleasantly surprised to see that the lyrics for some of the songs - as this album contains some singing and spoken word vocals unlike its predecessor - contained very strong and obvious influences from Anglo-Saxon poetry. I will discuss this more in relation to specific examples later in the review, when it comes to the songs in question.

One last general point I'd like to make about this album is that it pushes at the boundaries of what we might traditionally define as dungeon synth (although as I said in the first edition of this magazine, that's a hard task to do), and in places the lines between dungeon synth and Early Music (which for the time being you can understand to mean music from the Middle Ages and Antiquity) become quite blurred. In particular the use of sung vocals the old Norse language, with a very barebones instrumental accompaniment played on instruments reminiscent of Medieval ones (two such songs in particular which stand out in this regard are 'Heill Odinn' and 'Heill Freyja'). As discussed in the previous edition of Dungeons of Darkness, the use of vocals in dungeon synth is somewhat controversial. Nevertheless, I would not hesitate to class 'The Ways of Yore' as a dungeon synth album, and in my opinion the vocals on the album add a great deal to the atmosphere and to the music also.

So, let's get down to the individual songs!

01 - God From The Machine

'God From The Machine' sets the minimalist tone which pervades this album. A bass drum, tambourine knock out a simple beat at the start, one which continues throughout the song (although it is augmented). A harp-like instrument carries the main melody here - it plays a sort of descending glissando every second bar. This glissando is added to and played with a little bit in the middle of the piece, with what almost sounds like a change in rhythm. Another synth, which sounds somewhat like a violin or brass section plays a very evocative harmony in the background.

The melody of the harp changes slightly towards the middle, while the volume builds up in a crescendo to a climax which drops still when the violin/brass is cut, and the harp stops playing continuously. The bass drum, tambourine and harp carry on their initial riff through to the end.

I don't quite know why, but this song makes me think of Stonehenge. Something about it has a powerful magic to it. The song is quite bare-bones, very simplistic. It has a very meditative feel which helps one to enter a spiritual sort of mindset - much like 'Channeling The Power of Souls Into A New God' on his debut album.

02 - The Portal

This song started out brilliantly for me. It had a really interesting riff played on a harp, which felt magical but also quite upbeat. The sound of a hammer played in the background and was added to by a tambourine, guitar and the very faint sound of a drum. The initial melody heard at the start of the piece repeats as a drone throughout, much like in 'God From The Machine'.

Then, in came a synth which just utterly ruined it. I understand Varg said in the promotion of this album that it would combine the sounds of the past and the present. But this synth sounded way too modern for me - it sounded like one of those 'bubble voice' sounds on a keyboard, and it sounded bloody awful to me. That synth in itself played a complimentary melody to the guitar and harp : it wove between them much like the instruments did in the song 'Forest Murnur' by Dolch. Nonetheless, while I could appreciate the artistry that went into the composition of this song, the synth totally shattered my mood and made the song unenjoyable.

Which is a pity because, as I said, the composition is actually quite interesting. It shows a development of Vikernes' compositional skills as a non-metal musician. Of his earlier ambient works it has oftentimes been said that Varg's composition techniques work great with distorted guitars, bass and drums, but that those same techniques fall flat on their arse when applied to dungeon synth and that Varg doesn't know how to properly adapt his style to the genre. I can certainly understand those sentiments with regards to 'Daudi Baldrs', 'blidskjalf', and I can understand a similar criticism being made of 'Sol Austan, Mani Vestan'. With this album, however, Varg shows a clear development in his skills as a composer for the keyboard (which, despite the heavy guitar and bass presence on this album is still the dominant instrument). It is really satisfying to see such musical development, but although the song is impressive in that regard, I still cannot bring myself to like it.

'The Portal' ended in a similar way to 'God From The Machine' : all the augmentation is stripped away from the original riff and it simply repeats a few more times 'til the end. Some part of me thinks this song structure will get boring after a while.

03 - heill Odinn

This song is definitely one of my favourites on the album. I would venture to call it an Early Music song, as its only instrumentation is a harp (though it sounds like it might be a guitar), bass, drum and tambourine. There's certainly no synthesizers here or anything which sounds particularly modern.

The lyrics are just 'heill Odinn, Saell Odinn' over and over again - Varg isn't trying to use this song to tell a story per se. My perspective on it is that this song is almost written with the same intentions as 'Gloria's, or 'Alleluia's are written by Christians ; as a musical re-iteration of one's faith and devotion. As an expression of that.

Musically the song follows the same structure as the previous two songs. Which, although I thought I'd be bored of by this point, didn't spoil things too much for me. Especially as the songs on their own have nothing wrong with them - they only seem repetitive to me in the context of the album.

The first few bars has Varg singing the tune, while a bass guitar and drum plays (though these are scarcely audible). It is later accompanied by the harp. Over the course of the song drumbeats and tambourines are added in to augment the singing.

However, that's not the most impressive/interesting part of the song. As the track progresses, Varg weaves in a second and then a third vocal line, which create shimmering and haunting harmonies. These harmonies eventually become the musically dominant theme, with the initial one losing ground - I think it is this harmonic variation which keeps the piece in its minimalism from seeming too repetitive or boring (which is no easy feat, especially considering that the bass remains the same throughout the entire three minutes).

These added vocals aggrandise into a crescendo caused by the thickening texture, which finally cascades in a return to the single voice, bass and drum playing the same riff heard from the beginning. Without a lot of ceremony, the song ends thusly.

04 - Lady In The Lake

I'm not in love with the synth Varg uses to open this piece. The gripes I have with it are found in the tone of much of this album, and while it's ultimately not egregious it's something I feel worth nothing. To my tastes, it sounds too digital and artificial, with its buzzing, technological edge.

In terms of melody, a single drone repeats throughout the entire song. The synth layering itself is quite interesting in the beginning - the artificial-sounding synth which plays the drone has a strong, percussive attack (marked by a deep 'thud' at the start of each note), and plays seven notes, each of which decays into a silence which lasts for a split second before the next note sounds.

Later on in the piece this silence is masked by the presence of string pads harmonizing upon the drone - these pads have a greater reverb which makes them sound out over the emptiness.

Atop a beautifully harmonized drone, in the middle of the song we hear some spoken word lyrics ;

"She came from the water,
Bold and beautiful.
Mighty sorceress from below."

Aside from perhaps being a reference to Arthurian legends of the Lady in the Lake claiming Excalibur (which is based on earlier Saxon mythology surrounding rivers and lakes), I do not know what the lyrics or title of this song could be referring to. Regardless, the music stands on its own here.

The minimalist arrangement works here again, in isolation, and it flows nicely, with the synth harmonies rising in pitch as the music fades into the end.

05 - The Coming Of Ettins

Another song, another drone! Although the drone here is, like in 'Lady In The Lake' below the more interesting and developed musical themes which harmonize above it, this device is starting to grow quite old on the album. Once again, I would have no problem bearing it in isolation - 'The Coming Of Ettins' is a very beautiful piece - but the game is starting to get old.

Nonetheless, there are a variety of synths heard here beside the drone, and they play polyphonic melodies, making this piece less predictable than some of the others. Admittedly, at certain points the arrangement becomes so complicated that it's hard to even identify or notice the drone, but it is there alright!

As with the previous track, 'The Coming Of Ettins' has spoken word parts to it also. It begins with deep ambient mumbblings (which I have to say were quite spooky and added a lot of atmosphere to the piece, perfectly complementing its meaning), most likely voice recordings. Then, after a brief space of the drone harmonizing with a string pad, Varg's voice enters. The instrumentals are stripped to just the drone and a sort of harp-like instrument. This same pattern repeats - the song alternates between periods of sparse texture complemented by spoken word and periods where the orchestration becomes more complex, with additional instruments (noticeably string pads) playing new and developed harmonies.

The lyrics themselves tell simplistically of the giants in Norse mythology, and how they ruled the earth in evil before they were beaten and diminished by the Aesir. While not too complex, the spoken word parts do a good job in telling a story, and an interesting one at that! Varg adds a lot of atmosphere to the piece with these serious utterances. That atmosphere continues right to the end, with those same mumbblings from the beginning (which sound to me like the ettins which the song describes) fading with the music as the song reaches its conclusion.

06 - The Reckoning Of Man

Once again, we have a drone. The drone melody itself is nice enough, actually, and it is played on a xylophone-like synth. Although it is a drone, I am not as annoyed with it as I have been with the others, in part because this piece isn't entirely about the music (at least, as I perceive it). This is the song on the album with the most spoken words, and also where the words are most important to the song. Above a musical backdrop of the drone accompanied by an alternate harmony played by the same synth, every line begins with "I remember". With a lot of bass and an ambient echo to them, the spoken word parts feel as if they are reaching back into the past to recover knowledge from "a world that was woefully lost".

It is of note here that Varg has drawn strongly from the influences of Norse poetry (not surprising, considering the subject matter of this song and the album in general). This comes across in the strong alliteration Varg uses, which is a defining feature of both Norse and Anglo-Saxon poetry. It can be seen in the lyrics shown here, taken from the official Burzum website.

These lyrics really speak to me. It reminds me a lot of the 'archaeological imagination' - putting the flesh on the bones of the past which survive to the present. Especially for someone like Varg who feels that the Norse religion and culture is his true identity, its loss and absence in the historical record must be quite a psychological blow, and this song and the lyrics of it almost a way to bandage it. These lyrics look back wistfully and yes, perhaps romantically, and express his solidarity with those ancient beliefs and customs.

Lyrics aside, the music is also quite brilliant. Although the synth is quite artificial-sounding (which you might have guessed I'm not too fond of by this point), the melody itself is really beautiful and evocative. At parts it feels empty and pensive, when the two 'bell-like' synths are playing the drone and its accompaniment. But in between the spoken word parts, when a buzzing synth plays a superimposed harmony, it feels as if the power of that old Norse magic is being resurrected. And I feel it.

In short, this is a good song, and one of my favourite on the album!

07 - Heil Frejya

'Heil Frejya' is one of the pieces on this album more akin to Early Music than to dungeon synth. The only instruments are Varg's singing, a very deep ambient drum (it sounds like a floor tom, but my mind is tempted for the sake of ambience to call it a shaman drum), and a synth which sounds like a rather realistic harp. The drone in this piece, played on the harp, almost sounds like interrupted glissandos up to certain intervals - quite enjoyable in itself. And considering that it is not at the

Lyrics to "The Reckoning Of Man" -

I remember the shining sanguine Sun
the frozen forests and fallen leaves,
and the hollow hill under the sky.

I remember the complex cold caverns,
the long tranquil tunnels
and the large underground lakes.

I remember the dim depths of the Earth,
the lucid lady in the light
and her sacred stanza.

I remember the bright beast in her boat,
the tall troll telling her tales,
and the honey in the haunted hollow.

I remember the protected password,
the secret soothing symbol
and the old Odal objects.

I remember the red runes on the rock,
the spell of seeing being sung,
and the bold opening up of the beautiful
burrow.

I remember the coming of man reborn,
the birth of Baldur the bright,
the return of a world that was woefully lost.

forefront of this song, the repetition of the drone can here, as with many other pieces on this album, be forgiven when considered in isolation.

What is at the forefront of the music is Varg's vocals. Part of it is almost like spoken-word, others more like Medieval chanting (although I should note that it is not plainchant - that is something different). Sometimes he holds long notes which harmonize nicely with the harp. This punctuates his exclamations of 'heil Frejya!'. There isn't any harmony done per se with the vocals, although I can tell Varg has recorded two separate vocal tracks, one for the left ear and one for the right ear of a headset or stereo player, and with different mastering.

The lyrics are much the same as those of 'heil Odinn', only with Frejya being substituted for Odinn. I think it fills much the same function, almost like an invocation. I really like this quote by Varg Vikernes from the article 'A Burzum Story Part 1 - The Origin and Meaning', in which he says ;

"Burzum in itself was a spell. The songs were spells and the albums were arranged in a special way, to make the spells work. Burzum was not intended for live-shows, but instead it was supposed to be listened to in the evening, when the sunbeams couldn't vaporize the power of the magic, and when the listener was alone - preferably in his or her bed, going to sleep. The two first albums are made for the LP format, meaning each side as a spell, so they don't work on CD unless you program the CD-player to only play the tracks of one side of the LP at the time. The later albums were created for CD, so they don't work as well on LP. The first track was supposed to calm down or rather "prepare" the listener, and make him or her more "susceptible" to the magic, the next song or songs were supposed to exhaust the listener and put him or her in a trance-like state of mind, and last track should "calm down" the listener and carry him or her into the "world of fantasy" - when he or she fell asleep. That was the spell, the magic that would make the imaginary past, the world of fantasy, real (in the mind of the listener). If you take a look at the Burzum albums and how they are built up you will see what I mean. The last track of the "spell" (LP side or CD) is always a calm (often synthesizer) track. Whether this works or not is of course another question, but that was the idea anyhow."

I think that magical aspect of Burzum's music is quite apparent on these songs, and on this album more generally. The pounding drums, the evocative singing and old instruments, and the nature of the lyrics all sound to me like the summoning back of old gods. It's wonderful!

08 - The Ways Of Yore

This track, like all the others, is based on a drone. This drone melody begins the piece, and it itself is a very minimalistic theme played on a synth which sounds like a mix between a harp and a bell. With lots of reverb! It is pleasant enough, however, and with some level of harmony right from the very beginning it sets a very mystical tone for this piece.

It is soon joined by a crashing distorted synth, which covers the drone with honestly fairly bland harmonies. These two instruments drag the song on in a dirge, with a bass guitar and drums occasionally providing some rhythmic variation and harmony beneath the two.

This carries on in a drone-like fashion : each instrument which adds to the mix carries on repeating its same melody. Above this there is some barely audible spoken word by Varg Vikernes, saying :

Lights in the lake.
Flickering phantoms.
Dancers in the deep.
White wonderful world.

Returning.

Rising,
hovering.

Warming,
Illuminating,

Returning. “

The lyrics, bare-bones as they are, speak of magical processes and hidden mysteries. The very echoic and ambient tone of this piece certainly compliments this. Listening to this piece I can imagine witnessing fairies fluttering above a lake in the moonlight. The spoken word is very evocative indeed!

The instrumentals, ambient as they are, go little beyond that. There is some praiseworthy harmony, and some noticeable crescendos as more instruments are added to the mix. But ultimately, as far as instrumentals go, the piece is made up of numerous composite drones, which raise the volume of the piece as more of them are added, and as various instruments stop playing one by one the dirge comes to a restful halt.

09 - Ek Fellr

This piece, in the vein of “heill Odinn”, sounds much more Medieval than the others. It too, as with all others on this album, is based on a drone, of Varg singing “Ek Fellr” - the only lyrics on this song. Varg is accompanied merely by a guitar, which plays sparse plucked chords while Varg sings. This piece is minimal, yet at the same time beautiful as “heill Odinn”. At parts of the piece Varg overdubs his vocals into impressive three-part harmonies which take the piece to interesting new places. The resonance of Varg’s singing here adds an atmospheric touch to “Ek Fellr”, while at the same time the piece is interesting enough to hold my attention and stand on its own. It is much more tangible than “The Ways Of Yore” and other similar pieces on this album.

10 - hall Of The Fallen

This song begins with the spoken word, the only instrumentals being a sort of shimmering sound which is hard to make out, let alone define as an instrument.

The lyrics (shown to the right) are full of references to Odinn, the Allfather, and how he hung himself from Yggdrasil. The lyrics speak of the ardent pagan belief in rebirth of the soul, and of the glory that those who live honourable lives will forever enjoy. His spoken word, as with other instances of spoken word on this album, is very echoic.

A bass guitar is the first instrument we hear in the instrumentals. As expected, it plays a drone - a simple one, above which an artificial-sounding synth plays a bouncing melody in harmony. Later, that familiar distorted synth appears over the top of it, turning briefly the piece into cacophonous melody. The distorted synth goes silent from time to time, leaving only the bass guitar while Varg speaks various segments of the lyrics, before returning in its shimmering brilliance.

“hall Of The Fallen” feels like a message, a statement more than much else. Through a reduction of the instrumentals at the appropriate intervals, Varg draws sharp focus to the spoken word lyrics and the heathen message of them. While the instrumentals have some ambience to them, this piece overall doesn’t interest me very much, since although the lyrics are bold they aren’t very discursive, and do not give the mind much to chew on.

Lyrics to “hall Of The Fallen” -

hung in the tree of life.
Wounded. Bleeding.
I fall from the hall of gods!

The bond has been cut.
I cannot stand, nor speak.
I cannot crawl, nor think clearly.
I start over again. And again. And again.

The bond has been cut.
The tree has fallen.
The life of a god,
returns. Again.

There is no death for the honourable.
There is no end for the honourable.

Only eternal rebirth.

11 - Autumn Leaves

Here Varg does something which I find quite annoying. “Autumn Leaves” is not a new composition, rather it is based on the melody of “Der Tod Wuotans”, the second track from Burzum’s most famous album “Hlidskjalf”. On this album Varg has released this re-recorded version, but under a different name. I feel this is disingenuous - it implies that the song is new (and, especially for fans eagerly anticipating his album, reading this in press release would certainly imply it) when in fact it isn’t. This isn’t something new for Varg - he has done it before with his song “Daudi Baldrs”, and others.

What is confusing is that Varg put out an album "From The Depths of Darkness" in 2011 which was mostly re-recorded songs, and he acknowledged this - and used their original titles. Perhaps this means that Varg is seeking to show a different side of "Der Tod Wuotans" in his re-imagining of it in "Autumn Leaves" - and to be fair this isn't an exact replica, as "Autumn Leaves" is shorter than "Der Tod Wuotans" - but regardless I think the name change is unnecessary.

Anyway, "Autumn Leaves" begins in a very peaceful tone. The bass guitar plays the drone, but one rarely notices it with the much more dulcimer synths playing above it. A crystalline synth which sounds a little like a dulcimer plays a harmony over the top of the bass, joined by a very soothing synth pad.

About halfway into the song, these two drop away, leaving only the bass guitar accompanied by the occasional drumbeat playing the same drone a few times. Then, in come the distorted synths from other tracks. These take the place of the more soothing synths heard before, adding a jarring, discordant yet eerily powerful aspect to this part of the song.

In the same way as they entered, the distorted synths exit this piece, and the gender synths return, along with the dulcimer ones, playing the drone and a minimal harmony on top of it. The strings eventually drop out, leaving only the dulcimer-like synth and the bass to draw "Autumn Leaves" to its end.

Overall this is still a very sweet song. I like to interpret the title in one of two ways - for it to either signify the end of autumn and the beginning of winter, or to mean the literal leaves of autumn falling from the trees.

12 - Emptiness

Weirdly enough, the song after "Autumn Leaves" is another remake, this time of "Tombet", the fourth song from Burzum's most acclaimed album "Hvis Lyset Tar Os". Once again, it is largely the same song, merely rebranded. However, I personally prefer this remake than I did of the previous one. I feel, more generally, that without the hissing low-fi feedback from "Hvis Lyset Tar Os" (which, in my opinion was WAY too overdone), the true beauty of this piece stands out.

The drone is played by an instrument which sounds somewhat like a guitar, and I cannot be sure whether it is a digital or analogue instrument. The reverb in this piece is intense, and rather than making it more atmospheric I feel it highlights the beauty of the notes and their harmonies. The drone is soon joined by a higher-pitched guitar line and an ever-so-slightly distorted strings pad laying their simplistic harmonies on top. It was good taste for Varg to refrain from using the heavier synths here - they would have really destroyed the pure beauty of the melody.

Drums and some sparse other instruments make their appearance very mildly as the drone and its harmonies continue. The piece manages to be all in one both meditative and captivating. You feel as if you are in a trance while listening to it, yet you are not taken away from your body, and your focus remains on what you're hearing in front of you. Despite the continued and audible drone the tune never becomes boring in the first section of this remake of "Tombet".

The second section begins about halfway through the song. All other instruments drop out, including the previous drone, leaving only a harp-like synth playing an almost through-composed melody improvising around a central motif, accompanied at first only by basic single-note accompaniment in its own lower register. Later a piercing synth pad plays a very high harmony above it, which slides in and out of the listener's perception like watching clouds drift by. Very faint drums can be heard in the background, beating out a repetitive rhythm in a gradual crescendo leading the harp-like synth (still improvising upon the second motif) until they both fade into stillness.

13 - To Hell And Back Again

This last piece of the album - to the best of my knowledge - is a new composition by Varg.

It begins with a drone - surprise, surprise - played on a bell-like synth. It is accompanied soon by a bass guitar and another bell synth playing counterpoint and harmonies below and above the drone motif respectively.

Later a shimmering, slightly-distorted synth enters, adding its own harmonies to the mix. This synth reverberates much more than the others, lending a greater sense of atmosphere to this otherwise almost piddling piece. It ducks back and forth, fading

in and out of focus, changing between higher and lower registers. All the while, the drone maintains a dirge beneath the other instruments.

Once other instruments have entered, as with other songs on this album, they tend not to change the harmony or counterpoint which they play. It's a disappointingly lazy song structure. And, as with many other songs like it, instruments gradually drop out of the mix one by one, bringing a predictable but desired diminuendo end to this ten-minute dirge.

"To Hel And Back Again" is a decent enough song, but it isn't as atmospheric as others nor is it as interesting to listen to. It fails to achieve a sort of meditative effect also, and in my opinion it constitutes a rather boring and unsatisfying ending to an album that leaves much to be desired.

Final Thoughts : "The Ways Of Yore" as an album was largely a disappointment to me. It is not an album I greatly enjoy listening to - despite having given it multiple chances - compared to Varg's other works.

One glaring problem for me when listening to it is that the album has little sense of continuity or unity. Pieces sound very different between each other, using wildly different instrumentation. To me, this causes the album to lack direction and consistency. It attempts to cross between more acoustic-sounding and more digital-sounding music, and in my opinion this compromises its strength as a unit. Are we listening to a Medieval-esque album with guitar and marvellous three-part vocal harmonies or are we listening to deep-in-the-dungeon synth music? Ironically, one thing that is consistent throughout the album is one of the things that makes me dislike it significantly - the drone. Every single piece on this album, except the two remakes of earlier songs, were based on a drone that repeats continually throughout the whole song. Varg does his best to layer harmonies on top of it - and at times they can be beautiful but it appears as if Varg has clutched onto this songwriting method like a hammer, and he now applies it to every song he writes, bashing drones into songs until they just about look like they fit on their own, but bear the same dents betraying their poor construction as all his other songs on the assembly-line.

Overall, I give this album 2 out of 5, and would not recommend it to anyone except keen Burzum fans. Listen to a few of the songs (like Heill Odinn) in isolation if you wish to appreciate their beauty - you'll get sick of the one if you hear the whole!

- Levi Talvi



[HTTP://WWW.BARBARIANSKULL.COM/](http://www.barbarianskull.com/)

Recording At home

Part III - Writing Songs

If you've been following the "Recording At home" series of articles from the previous issues of Dungeons of Darkness, you may already have your own home studio, and you'll have embarked upon the journey of learning how to actually play the keyboard - that instrument so central to the music we all love. Now we'll examine how to actually go about writing songs. This article will focus primarily on the dungeon synth genre, yet will contain information which can be applied to all genres of music, especially black metal which dungeon synth shares a particular similarity to.

Here we shall go through the basics of how to write a song, covering a vital component of the song in turn.

Song Structure

Dungeon synth is somewhat different in its structuring to most genres of music. The majority of pop music, rock music and even some genres of metal follow a basic structure of :

INTRO - VERSE - CHORUS - VERSE - CHORUS - BRIDGE - CHORUS - (CHORUS TO FADE)

Each of these sections of the song are usually based on a riff (also known as a motif, or musical theme). This is a pattern of notes which is repeated, and sometimes altered slightly, within a single part of a song, or throughout the whole song.

For example, taking the song of "Die Liebe Nerpus" by Burzum - the song is quite obviously divided into two riffs which repeat over and over again, alternating between each other. One riff goes higher up in pitch than the other, spanning nearly an octave's range, while the other riff is lower, and stays within the range of a fifth. Each of these riffs is repeated four times for each section.

Dungeon synth songs can vary tremendously in their structure, although very few follow the aforescribed structure used so commonly in other genres.

Some are through composed (which is when no sections of a song are repeated).

Some have two sections which alternate throughout the song (we'll call this ABABAB structure, naming one hypothetical song section A and the other hypothetical song section B).

Some have three sections which alternate throughout the song - this can go ABCABC or ABCBBA (naming the additional hypothetical song section C as well as having A and B).

The choice of whether or not you do this is entirely up to you. Some artists follow a standard song structure for most of their songs, others don't. When writing a song, you should merely do whatever feels right - don't try to put in extra sections or cut some out because it doesn't meet your criteria of what a song "should be like".

Melody

Melody is the tune of a song. It's the part that you hum, it's usually the highest melody, the one that you notice and remember regardless of what other instruments are playing at the time. Though you should be as free as you like when composing your melody there are a few things it's always worth bearing in mind :

1) Key/Time signature

(Key signatures and time signatures were covered in the last edition of *Dungeons of Darkness*). Once you have chosen your key signature and time signature, you should generally try to stay within them (unless you plan modulations or key changes, although if you are doing so you are likely at a higher level of music theory proficiency where you're confident enough to do it without advice).

The key signature, and subsequent scale it is based on, is a good source to tell you which notes will sound good in your song, and which will sound discordant. While this shouldn't be held as a prescriptive rule, it should be a descriptive rule for crafting melodies. In the same vein, it should not be a prescriptive rule that minor scales are always used for dungeon synth music, but it should be a descriptive one - this is because minor scales sound serious and give your music an air of importance which songs in major scales typically lack, as they sound much jollier like a pop song.

And bearing your time signature in mind will save you a great deal of burden when recording, and writing generally. If you're in the middle of writing a song and you come up with something in a different time signature (say, you come up with a riff in 3/4 time signature rather than in 4/4 time signature), it is usually better just to write the riff down if you can or at least record a voice memo of it, and use it at a later date in another song which is in 3/4. While sometimes, through the use of triplets (three beats squashed into the space of two), and rhythmic variations (like turning a crotchet into a minim to give a riff four beats in a bar rather than four, thereby allowing it to fit into a 4/4 time signature), a riff in a time signature outside of your pre-decided one can be used, it is difficult to do, and so if you are just beginning on your songwriting journey, you should not attempt this until you have had more practise. In addition, time signatures can be changed during a song, as with key signatures, although again this is best left undone until one becomes more proficient.

Although the most commonly used (and easy to write in) time signatures are 3/4 and 4/4, one may also experiment in more complex time signatures if one feels able to, such as 6/8, 9/8, or even 5/4. That notwithstanding, any signature except 3/4 and 4/4 is extremely rare in dungeon synth - I myself cannot even recall a single song outside of those parameters.

2) The Actual Notes

Of course, the melody of any riff will be constructed out of notes. When it comes to actually deciding which notes to use for your melody, it helps immensely to know and understand music theory. The notes that will sound "good" in your song will be decided by the key signature you use - this will tell you the appropriate scale to select your notes from.

In order to achieve a more Medieval, fantasy-esque feel to your melodies, it is best to write them in modes rather than in keys. While the history of musical modes is fascinating and complicated, in short modes were the system of notes which existed before the major and minor scales we know today existed. They were predominant in all Medieval music, and are instantly recognizable as different.

Because modes sound quite different and at times almost jarring compared to what modern ears are used to, oftentimes it is more practical simply to achieve a modal 'feel' by flattening the seventh note/degree of the scale whose notes you use in your song.

Take, for example, the key of D minor. To make it feel more modal, rather than playing a C#, you flatten that note to a C. You use the corresponding chords as well, playing C major instead of C# major.

Using this technique can give your songs a distinctly Medieval sound while still sounding pleasant to the modern ear!

3) The Triad

This will become much more relevant when we examine harmony - the third main component of songwriting - and it refers to the three notes that form a minor chord (minor here being used since it is predominant in dungeon synth music).

Generally, melodies which are very striking and memorable are based on or around the minor triad. That is, the notes that make up the minor chord of the first note of the scale you're using for your piece. The first (tonic), third (median) and fifth (dominant) tones of the scale.

Many folk songs throughout history (for example, the oldest song from Scandinavia, "Dromte Mig En Drom I Nat" uses notes entirely within the minor fifth span) have been based around the triad, and they stick because it is memorable.

Moreover, 'broken chords' (when one plays the first, third, fifth and then third notes of the triad in order) are often used as a very easy accompaniment to play with the left hand, which makes your pieces sound much more intricate and interesting, as will be examined in the section on harmony.

Especially when they begin songwriting, many people typically stay within the triad range instinctively. While melodies outside of it can be great and memorable, if you're just starting out it may be a good idea to pick some notes within those five at first.

harmony

harmony is essentially the music theory concerning how to make more than one note sound good when played simultaneously. Some dungeon synth songs forego harmony (for example, 'Scorn And Blood Flow Down The River Ván' by Brungnir), but the majority usually have simplistic 'two-note' harmonies (for example, 'Die Liebe Nerpus' or 'Daudi Baldrs' by Burzum). More experienced and knowledgeable musicians often used three-part harmonies (ie, harmonizing three notes or more together, as Lord Lovidicus and Erang often do), to give a more 'full' sound to their music. Although, if you're entirely new to creating music it may be difficult for you to leap into three-part harmonies and other such harmonic devices at first, hopefully by the end of reading this section you should be confident enough and comfortable with knowing how to make a good two-part harmony for your dungeon synth songs.

And, in my opinion, that's all you need really!

1) Drones and Double harmonies

As said before, a chord is simply two or more notes played together. If one is only playing two notes together at a time, then technically there is very little one can do to make a mistake. The only combinations of notes which will sound instinctively discordant (basically anyone can tell it sounds horrible, and like a mistake) are ;

First note + one semitone above/below. AND First note + one whole tone above/below.

The two above are the only true examples of discord you can get if you play only two notes together. Discord is simply that - when two notes do not harmonize together. It is NOT the same as distortion, which is when some degree of 'white noise' or other factors making the sound of music unclear, as on guitars in metal, is present.

Although technically a note six semitones up from the first note (or the first note, and one semitone down from the fifth) is discordant in music theory - and is known as the tritone (aka, 'The Devil's Interval' because it's use was forbidden in the Middle Ages due to the belief that its sound could summon demons) - especially to most black metal musicians and dungeon synth musicians it sounds perfectly palatable.

So, really, any one note can harmonize with pretty much any other in a chord. This is why plainchant which is sung with a drone (either on a burdy-gurdy or a vocal drone) normally sounds fairly good, because whatever the main melody is doing, chances are good that it will harmonize with the bottom drone note.

If you're starting out making songs, and you're a bit confused about harmony, it may be a good idea to start out with either a drone (which is the easiest) or a very simple two-part harmony (eg, your right hand on the keyboard only plays one note at a time, and so does your left hand, so that at any one point you have two notes being played).

however.

The note you pick for your drone, or your harmonies, must be in the scale of your piece!

This is incredibly important. You must pick notes which are in the scale of your piece for your left-hand harmony parts just like you do for your main melody (usually played by the right hand). As a matter of fact, it is more important for your harmony parts, because it is harmony and chords which give the feeling of being 'at home' in a piece of music, that makes a piece of music sound like it was actually coherent and planned, rather than just the outcome of random notes being played.

Because, technically, a monkey or even a computer could write a song. If you were to create two bags of balls, and one bag had different note lengths on it (like, some of the balls said 'crotchet', some of the balls said 'minim', some said 'quaver' etc... (and another bag with different notes on the piano (like, some of the balls said 'Bb' or 'E'), and you picked one ball out of each bag at random, and lined them all up, you would have the notes of a song. As a matter of fact, if you were to do that with intervals in a scale rather than mere notes (for example, if the balls said something like 'first note' or 'fourth note' on them rather than the actual keys themselves) you would have a rather passable song created entirely by chance. Howard Goodall demonstrates this in his documentary series "How Music Works", which I highly recommend you watch to help you understand this stuff.

But, if you were to write two different lines for the left hand and right hand using the first method (where one of the bags had balls saying actual notes as opposed to intervals) the piece would sound entirely chaotic. If you wish, you can look up 'Atonal music' online, as this largely demonstrates the point. 'Atonal music' - and some people argue that by definition it cannot be considered music - deliberately creates music which follows none of the rules of theory whatsoever. And, to most people, it sounds a lot of the time like someone is trying to place a normal piece of music but is making a lot of mistakes.

You don't want your dungeon synth to sound like that!

It will sound like that a lot more if your harmony is out-of-key (ie, if you're using notes which aren't in the scale of your piece).

Although if you're using a two-part harmony you can get away with using any note as a drone for your piece, using the first note of your scale (the tonic) is usually the best way to go. This is because the chords you accompany usually should be a more obvious indication of the scale you're in, and it's usually best to at least start the harmony of your piece on the tonic, and to return to it at the end. Exactly **HOW** you return to it is in the section on cadences later (which, although they are a part of 'main melodies' also, I will include in this section on harmony because a large part of cadence is the harmony in question).

Ergo, if the harmony in your piece is going to be a drone (ie, you only have one note that plays over and over again while the main melody goes on on top, like in Burzum's song 'Keliobesten', where the bass plays a simple F throughout the whole piece), it is wise to make the drone note the first note of your scale.

Another alternative to a drone is to have a harmonic accompaniment which moves and changes. When your harmony gets really technical, so that both your harmony and 'main melody' are interesting to listen to in their own right if you were to listen to them alone, it's known as 'counterpoint'. Although this wouldn't really be considered counterpoint, because the harmony isn't very interesting to listen to on its own, 'Die Liebe Nerpus' by Burzum (which, as you may have noticed, I use as an example a lot, because it's a piece most dungeon synth fans will have heard, and if not can easily look up) is a good case in point of a harmonic accompaniment which moves. The harmony in this piece goes 'D, D, D, C', with each note lasting for a whole bar of three beats, over and over again throughout the song.

Note, also, that 'D' is the first note (tonic) of the scale. And C is a flattened seventh note of the scale (subtonic). As another general rule of thumb, if your one-note left hand harmonies stick to the first (tonic), flattened seventh (subtonic), sixth (submediant) and fifth (dominant) notes of the scale, going downwards from the first note, your accompaniment will usually sound pretty good. For example, a very common harmonic accompaniment in lots of songs is :

First (tonic), flattened seventh (subtonic), sixth (submediant), and flattened seventh (subtonic). With each note being held for one bar, this is often repeated throughout most songs and it sounds quite satisfying to listen to.

If you're just beginning to write music and want to use a two-part harmony in your songs, I strongly recommend at first just doing something similar to the harmony in 'Die Liebe Nerpus', with each note that you play in your left hand for the harmony

being held throughout the entire bar. If you're only playing single notes at a time, as a general rule of thumb it'll sound OK, and if by chance it doesn't, you'll notice and be able to fix it just by ear if not through knowledge of the theory. You can see this in 'Die Liebe Nerpus' incidentally - the harmony part is a simple drone, which goes 'D, D, D, C', with each note being held for a whole bar of three beats, throughout the whole piece. But for the first riff, which plays the notes 'D, F, E, E, F, C, A, C, F, E, C, F', the second bar of three beats (which plays E, F, C) clashes with the D that is played because a D and an E are only two semitones apart and so create discord when played together. If you listen closely, it sounds jarring and wrong. Try playing the D and E together on a piano (or any instrument) and this discord becomes immediately apparent - this is a good trick for easily identifying whether something is discordant without having to rely on music theory (although knowing the theory is better). When writing harmonic accompaniments which have more than one note, you should be extra careful to check that all (if not most) of the notes you are playing harmonize together. It is better if at least notes that are played at the same time, are correctly in harmony - if you play them in harmony and then one note changes to a discordant one (say, you play a C and an E, then change the E to a D while holding the C) the discord is usually much less noticeable and more palatable.

Once you get more experienced at it you can write left-hand harmonies which are more complicated. For example, in Lord Lovidicus' song 'Fugue Of Thuringwethel', the left hand part moves relatively fast also, and the notes certainly aren't held for the whole bar. You could listen to the left hand all on its own and it would still be quite interesting. This is somewhat more difficult, but definitely doable once you've given yourself some practise and experience making simpler two-part harmonies.

Remember, especially when you're starting out, that dungeon synth is not an overly technical genre of music. That's one of the amazing things about it, that in many regards it's simple enough that a complete beginner can begin making music within a matter of weeks. So, for most intents and purposes, simple two-part harmonies are all you'll need in dungeon synth. That notwithstanding, if you want to know, read on to learn the basics of how to work in more complicated harmonies!

2) Using triad chord harmonies and broken chords

Triad chords are chords with three notes in them. And, three specific notes - the first (tonic), third (median) and fifth (dominant) notes of the scale of the first note. They can be either major or minor depending on which key the piece is in. It is an important rule of thumb to bear in mind when constructing your triad chords that the notes in the triad chords must be the same as those in your scale.

Therefore, for example, if one is playing in the scale of D minor (with the C# flattened to a C to make it sound more Medieval) then one can use the following triads : D minor (D, F, A), C major (C, E, G), Bb major (Bb, D, F), A minor (A, C, E), F major (F, A, C) and G minor (G, Bb, D). The one chord that you cannot play (even though the first and second notes of this chord are in the scale of D minor) is E minor, because it is made up of E, G, and B. Since the B is always flattened to a Bb in the D minor scale, this is not allowed in the left hand just as it isn't in the right. Therefore, you cannot play that chord. Equally, you can't play a triad chord starting on any note that isn't in the D minor scale (for instance, you could not play an F# minor chord - F#, A, C# - because this triad contains notes which are not in the scale.

Just as there is a difference between major and minor scales, there is a difference between major and minor chords. This difference is more clearly illustrated on the piano spread in the previous edition of Dungeons of Darkness. However, you can 'construct' a triad chord by following a simple formula :

MAJOR CHORD	MINOR CHORD
Play the first note of the scale (tonic), then skip three semitones to the third note of the scale (mediant), then skip two semitones to the fifth note of the scale (dominant). Playing these all at once will provide you with a major triad of the first note which you started out on.	Play the first note of the scale (tonic), then skip two semitones to the third note of the scale (median), then skip three semitones to the fifth note of the scale (dominant). Playing these all at once will provide you with a minor triad of the first note which you started out on.

Or, as my friend puts it, "For a major chord, skip three semitones then skip two. For a minor chord, skip two semitones then skip three."

Scales also follow a similarly simple formula, which, for the purposes of convenience, I shall include here.

MAJOR SCALE	MINOR SCALE
*First note (tonic)	*First note (tonic)
*Second note (supertonic) - two semitones higher	*Second note (supertonic) - two semitones higher
*Third note (mediant) - two semitones higher	*Third note (mediant) - one semitone higher
*Fourth note (subdominant) - one semitone higher	*Fourth note (subdominant) - two semitones higher
*Fifth note (dominant) - two semitones higher	*Fifth note (dominant) - two semitones higher
*Sixth note (submediant) - two semitones higher	*Sixth note (submediant) - one semitone higher
*Seventh note (subtonic) - two semitones higher	*Seventh note (subtonic) - three semitones higher
*Eighth note (tonic) - one semitone higher	*Eighth note (tonic) - one semitone higher

As mentioned earlier, flattening the seventh note (subtonic) by one semitone makes a piece - especially in the minor scale - sound more Medieval, so when choosing notes from your scale remember that you can change the formula you use for your scale accordingly (so that, for a minor scale, the seventh note is two semitones higher than the sixth note, and one semitone higher in a major scale).

Lastly, with triad chords they can be in different inversions. This means that the notes of the scale are still there, just in a different order, and if you re-arranged them you could get the first note (tonic), third note (mediant) and fifth note (dominant) of a scale. For example, a chord made up of A, D, F played in that ascending order on the piano is still a D minor chord, even though it starts on an A, because if you re-arrange the notes you have D, F, A. Being able to recognize this and apply it properly in your music can be achieved by scale practise, familiarizing yourself with the scales and with all the different chords themselves.

When choosing which triad chords to play as harmonic accompaniment, it is important to bear in mind the notes you are playing as your main melody. For instance, to use the worn example of 'Die Liebe Nerpus' - the first riff which goes "D, F, E, E, F, C, A, C, F, E, C, F". Taking the first bar of that (which covers the notes D, F, E) and playing a C major chord underneath it wouldn't sound good because the notes D and F clash with the notes C and E in the C major chord respectively. The aforementioned rule about 'passing discord' is also applicable here - ie, if two play two notes at the same time which are harmonic, then change one to a note which is discordant while holding the other note, this is more acceptable than playing two discordant notes at the same time. When you first play a triad (and normally harmonizing chords like triads are held for an entire bar or more, so you won't need to change it very often) it is best to play it with a note in the triad itself, or if not with another note which isn't too discordant.

Another option available to you when using triads is, instead of playing all the notes simultaneously, to play one after the other in a cycle (playing the first, second, third and second notes of the triad chord in that order if in 4/4 time, and playing the first, second and third notes of the triad chord in that order if in 3/4 time), known as 'broken chords'. This can be somewhat more difficult to play 'live' and to co-ordinate between your different hands, but with a little practise it can sound quite impressive. The same rules apply as above, although because there are only two notes being played at any time there is less to worry about (for instance, if you play C, A, D in the main melody and C, E, C in the left-hand accompaniment with each note being held for a single crochet - a broken chord of C major - it is harmonic because at any one point the two notes being played are harmonic, whereas if you played the C major chord and held it for the whole bar of three beats, then the A and D would clash with the chord).

Finally, adding an octave (eight notes higher or lower in the scale than the first note, which has the same tone as the first note but higher or lower on the keyboard) to your triad chords (or even just to single-note accompaniments) makes your music sound a little fuller and more impressive - especially when played on a piano. It's the difference sometimes between sounding like a kid having piano lessons, once all your beautiful digital instrumentation is stripped away and you're sitting in front of a piano, and a performing musician.

3) Cadences

The material here applies to the notes in melodies as well as it does to chords and harmonic accompaniments generally (but moreso to the latter). A cadence (from the Latin word 'cadere' meaning 'to fall') simply refers to how a piece (or sometimes to how a section of the piece - ie, the chorus or verse - ends). It usually refers to the chords that accompany it, but can sometimes refer to other things.

There are many different cadences used to give different feels to the ending of a piece. The way to understand the theory of cadences is to name chords according to their place in the scale of the piece. For instance, a chord which is based on the triad starting on the first (tonic) note of the D minor scale (which will have the notes D, F, and A in it) will be called a 'first' chord, since it is based on the first note of the scale.

The most common cadence of all is the 'perfect cadence', which is when the second-to-last chord is a fifth chord and the last chord is a first. It sounds very satisfying and wholesome, and is used in almost all classical music, and in most pop music. Sometimes people just play the second-to-last chord of a perfect cadence but leave it there, which makes the piece sound unfinished, good for dramatic fades : this is known as an imperfect cadence.

The only other cadence commonly used or relevant to the dungeon synth genre is the 'plagal cadence' - going from a fourth chord to a first chord. This is often used in church music and gives a religious feeling to any piece.

Although cadences are primarily concerned with chords, because you have to harmonize your main melody with the chords, the cadence you use will normally shape (or fit around) your main melody. Meaning that when you say you've used a plagal cadence, for instance, it implies that there are likely to be certain notes in your main melody. And, just as the last chord of most cadences is the first chord, so too the last note of most pieces is usually the first (tonic) note of the scale of the piece. These are important things to bear in mind when writing the end of a piece of music.

Overall tips

The long reams about music theory can seem quite frightening. It gets even more frightening when you remember that this article only covers tips on basic aspects of music theory and how you can apply them to a song. These aren't things you can learn overnight just from reading this article, but hopefully based on the advice here you might find writing your own songs a little easier. I would also like to point out here that I myself am not an expert either in music theory or in writing songs. I've got no formal qualification in music theory (although I have learned it at an advanced level in secondary school), and although I've written a fair number of original songs already, I still have a lot to learn. These are essentially my tips from a beginner to another beginner.

Also, as I often say to my friend and other people when I'm helping in the songwriting process - "I can't write your song better than you can." No matter what my opinion is, no matter how technical I can get with the theory of it and back up my arguments, I simply can't write a song for your band better than you can. Especially in dungeon synth, where most songs are written by a single person for their solo project, people put their own experiences and musical tastes into songs which make many of them special and unique and creative. There is - technically - a theoretical solution to everything. Almost entirely based on his knowledge of music theory, Beethoven wrote the symphonies of his final years while completely deaf! Even more extreme, a computer could, if given appropriate theoretical information, create a theoretically correct piece of music. But that's not human, and it's not creative. Some might argue it's not even music.

So, if you feel like what you want to do goes against the advice I've given in this article, fuck me and fuck my advice! Who's this fat, verbose smarty-pants prick to tell you how your own music is supposed to sound? While music theory is a great guide to writing awesome songs, and it helps a lot, once you rely on it entirely it becomes a paradigm cage which limits your creativity. It's like your creativity is a bird growing in a cage - at first the cage is helpful because it stops the bird from falling to the ground before it can fly and dying, but once the bird has grown older the cage constrains it so it can't fly. There was a quote I read in an article about music theory (I cannot remember who said it, unfortunately) where someone said, to paraphrase,

that “Even though music theory teaches you the rules, it doesn’t mean you can’t break them, in the same way that knowing proper manners and etiquette doesn’t stop people from swearing.” Use music theory, and my advice, as something to help you write. But don’t be afraid to try new things and experiment and take risks! That’s how a genre becomes inbred!

And so, to conclude, here’s a few bullet-point tips (which may mention topics discussed previously) on how to improve your song-writing abilities :

*Listen to lots of music, from a wide variety of genres and artists. I’ve generally found that each new genre of music I’ve ‘gotten into’ has taught me something which has improved my songwriting process for all genres.

*Practise playing your musical instrument all the time – the more competent you are at playing the more things you can do when you write your own songs – especially scales, as these are a good basis for finding new riff ideas.

*Record as many of your ideas as you can – no matter how shitty or inconsequential they may seem, recording your ideas (whether in sheet music or at least as an audio sample) can be invaluable, as almost everything has the potential to be useful in another piece, in another context.

*If you’re unsure of yourself, or just starting out, keep it simple. Stay within the notes of your scale, and don’t try accidentals until you’re more secure in what you’re doing. Use a conventional time signature, keep harmonies basic, etc. . .

*Don’t add something for the sake of adding it – essentially it only compromises your individuality even further to allow preconceived notions of what a song **MUST** be to shape your music : there is nothing too long or too short, too high or too low, etc. . . there is only that which is right for you.

*Write music that you would want to listen to – not only does this help you stay true to your musical vision, but if you want these things in music, then chances are at least a few other people do too, and this means you’ll potentially have more fans.

*Stick around the triad a lot, both for harmonies and for main melodies.

*Adding an octave in the left hand makes you sound fancy and competent.

*If you have no ideas and want to write a song, a good way to generate some is to simply force yourself to play – put on a metronome (or even a drum track) and force yourself to improvise, no matter how simple it is, on the keyboard. If this doesn’t work, try playing just a single note on the keyboard at first, along with the metronome/drumbeat. Once you get bored enough to kill yourself playing that one note over and over again, change the rhythm a bit. And once even that bores you, try adding just a second note. And so on, and so forth. Chances are you’ll eventually find something that interests you.

*Don’t get stuck in a musical rut – it can be very tempting to always write songs with a tried-and-tested song structure, or in a key that you really like, etc. . . But after a while it becomes stale, and you run the risk of all of your songs sounding the same – which you don’t want by any means! To remedy this, throw yourself out of your comfort zone every now and then ; force yourself to write a song in an unusual key signature, or with a strange rhythm, or try your hand at through composition.

*If possible, and if you’re struggling to come up with ideas, try writing something with a friend. Oftentimes the fact that they have different musical ideas to you will open your eyes to something you might not have thought of on your own but which could be incredibly useful for your song.

*If you’ve got writer’s block – steal other’s works. I find doing cover songs in order to get over writer’s block has helped me significantly. One of the main ways it has helped is that when learning a piece, especially if I get something wrong at first, I play it in such a way that’s different and which sounds better to me. From there I play around with that sound until I end up with a whole original riff that came from someone else’s work. And, even if it doesn’t work, at the end of the day you end up with a new cover song that you could release, and more practise. That’s always good!

*Coming at things from a new angle can be very helpful. Try listening, if you have the software for it, to your own songs played backwards. Surprisingly enough this can come up with all sorts of whacky new ideas! Also, something like the Howard Goodall trick – writing a melody by picking numbers out of a bag – can help if you want to create something entirely random and new. Perhaps you could try writing a song from the end of it instead of the beginning, or switch the right and left hands around. Variety is the spice of life, after all!

-Levi Talvi

Review of 'Diary Of An Isolated'

'Diary Of An Isolated' is the latest demo by the ambient band Lug, hailing from Croatia, this band creates unconventional and evocative dark ambient music. Surprisingly enough, this demo doesn't seem to have dedicated cover art for it on its Bandcamp page, just a picture of a seemingly abandoned house... The name 'Lug' itself might be a reference to the Celtic god Lugh (the god of war and artistry). Without knowing much more about the artist himself, let's discuss the demo!

01 - Class Sphere Radiates The Silver Light

Considering that this album contains samples from the game 'Dear Esther', I suspect that some (or most) of the song titles might be references to that, but since I haven't played the game I don't really know.

I quite like this piece - it starts out with a sort of synth strings set, which sounds a little artificial but otherwise quite palatable. The strings seem to play in three (or maybe four-part harmonies), with parts both very low and very high in pitch harmonizing with each other. There seems to be, throughout most of it, a drone which is in a higher register (unusual for most drones, which are often used as a baseline or harmonic accompaniment where they are not in the musical foreground), playing a very simple melody of only three notes. While I'm normally against drones, I felt this one worked really well in the piece - although all the other string parts meshed together in a kind of whirling vortex which was hard to discern, the drone itself gave the song grounding and a sense of home. It

Around halfway through the piece the instrumentation of the drone changed, from strings to a harp. The instrumentation of the drone itself changes multiple times throughout this song, and perhaps this is one of the things which keep the piece from becoming boring (as is often a risk for music utilizing a drone), especially since, in the background of so many different instruments with little attack, it can be hard to pick out the drone itself and it sounds as if it fades in and out of the piece, despite always being there reassuringly.

This song carries on in much the same manner as previously described (although again, it certainly was not boring) until the end, where after a gradual crescendo the synths became 'shimmering' and the harp played what sounded like a sped-up version of the drone. This reached a climax of sorts and then faded out. I liked the effect - it gave this piece, which is quite evocative and relaxing and beautiful on its own, a sense of conclusion.

02 - Tears Of The Summer Clouds

The instrumentation of this piece is much the same as the first one - string pads and a harp-like instrument. But there's nothing wrong with that - these things work quite well together.

Also, this piece doesn't really have a drone, although it has a very long and repetitive section from the second minute or so onwards, which happens to harmonize with the bass parts of the first. I think this is quite a good move - it shows that the artist isn't simply relying on drones as a basic musical device because it's an easy thing to do.

The first section of the song is comprised entirely of shimmering string parts which harmonize in a very soothing manner upon a repeating drone in the lower register. It ends with the drone halting on one note, and all the other parts getting louder at first, until they drop out to leave only a single low-pitched note played by the drone.

This note is then held on through most of the final section of the song, changing only in the last bar of each riff so as not to clash with the main melody. That main melody is played on the same harp-like synth from before, a very simple melody with consistent rhythm which nonetheless is beautiful and evocative, with a great deal of reverb. I feel from listening to it that this makes the difference between it being background and foreground music - although this piece (and the demo more generally) is highly atmospheric for the most part and doesn't demand one's attention, the skilful songcraft and use of instruments with attack makes this song (and the album) interesting to listen to on its own also. At the end of the song, the harp drops out, and the strings hold a single note to a rather unceremonious fading outro.

03 - Wooden Ruins Of The Past

Certainly, this piece is one of the more unusual pieces within the dungeon synth genre (but that's a great thing!). The vast majority of it comprises a mere two-part harmony of the twinned bells, making the piece sound very bare-boned without any complicated layering (although it does not necessarily suffer as a consequence of this). Beginning with a very high-pitched note held on what sounds like a strings pad, this is accompanied by two bells, playing parallel melodies in harmony. The melody itself is all we hear after a while, since the string pads drop out after around a minute, and the twin bells play on their own for a minute longer a melody which consists of something which is rather repetitive, but varies enough that one cannot really consider it a drone, it is more like variations upon a musical motif.

During this section with just the twin bells, the spoken word sample - taken from the game 'Dear Esther' - beings, saying :

"When someone had died, or was dying, and was so ill they gave up what little hope they could sacrifice, they cut parallel lines into the cliff, exposing the white chalk beneath. You could see them from the mainland or the fishing boats and know to send aid or impose a cordon of protection, and wait a generation until whatever pestilence stalked the cliff paths died along with its hosts. My lines are just for this : to keep any would-be-rescuers at bay. The infection is not simply of the flesh. "

Make of that what you will. Although, I will say I find the voice quite soothing and atmospheric.

The bells carry on in the same way, playing variations upon an initial motif, in this manner during and after the spoken word. Something about the melody itself seems odd to me - it leaves me a bit confused, and not knowing quite how to feel. In some ways it is beautiful, and reflective, but it's also fast enough that one might consider it to have a more carefree attitude.

The bells eventually fade out though, to the mere sound of the ocean. Onto that faded the sound of a harp playing a simple three-note melody which repeats until the end. The ocean drops out soon afterwards, and later the harp fades to the end of the piece also. It's quite mysterious, that last section at the end, and I don't quite understand what purpose it serves. That notwithstanding, it doesn't count as a 'bad point' in my mind.

04 - Gallows At The Docks

'Gallows At The Docks' is short, purely atmospheric piece, not really music per se. It is only a minute long and consists of the sounds of an ocean, with howling winds mixed in with it. There isn't any significant change in dynamics until the end, when one can hear the first rumblings of a thunderstorm.

Final Thoughts : 'Diary Of An Isolated' was an excellent demo. Although it doesn't quite sound Medieval in tone, it doesn't need to, and this demo has a lot in it to appeal to die-hard dungeon synth fans. I quite enjoyed it, and would recommend it to others.

Fortunately, you can download the demo (and find other works by Lug) at this web address :

<https://lugmusic2.bandcamp.com/album/diary-of-an-isolated>

Overall, I would give the album three stars out of five. While I found the music on it quite enjoyable and interesting, and the songs were crafted well, they weren't impressive per se, and in my opinion weren't new or creative enough to warrant a higher rating. I say this to clarify that, although the number of stars I'd give this demo isn't stellar, that doesn't mean I don't like the demo - because I most definitely do! And it's worth adding to your dungeon synth collection.



-Levi Talvi

Interview with Ethereal Mists

Levi :

Tell us a little about yourself and your musical background.

Choul :

Firstly, thanks for the interview, very much appreciated.

I'm in my late 20s, male and I'm from Australia. My musical background is primarily black metal, as well as noise/ambient. My journey into creating music began around 2004, in the form of a black metal/noise project Bloodmoon which eventually took on more of a black metal/ambient style in 2005, and later this project transformed into my primary musical project, known as Entsetzlich.

Ethereal Mist was formed out of necessity, I wanted to create dark ambient/dungeon synth styled music, and I felt that Entsetzlich wasn't the right vessel to use for that purpose.

Levi :

What other artists have inspired/influenced you in creating your sound?

Choul :

Ethereal Mist is mainly inspired by the dungeon synth bands of the 1990s (Depressive Silence, Lamentation) as well as some dark ambient/black metal artists, such as Ghosts of Oceania, Drowning the Light, 90's ambient era Burzum, Dark Ages and the ambient works of Scribore/Veil of Darkness.

Levi :

What does the name 'Ethereal Mist' mean to you?

Choul :

The name Ethereal Mist was chosen to conjure up visions of a foreboding ghostlike mist filled with spirits and supernatural entities.

Levi :

What do you aim to do with your music?

Choul :

Musically, the aim of Ethereal Mist is to make the listener feel as if they are travelling on a journey through time and space, through life and then death, as a spirit. There is also a heavy focus on paranormal and astral elements (my personal interests).

Levi :

Do you use any particular gear to record your music, or editing software?

Choul :

I use an old Casio ctk-481 keyboard, and for recording I use a Sony digital recorder. I edit the files on my laptop, using the free editing program Audacity.

Levi :

Do you record music in a studio or at home, and why?

Choul :

Ethereal Mist is recorded at my home, in my garage. This is mostly due to the ease of recording and editing thereafter, and the extra reverb from the garage is an added bonus. I have no need or use for a large studio sound/production, I guess it's due to my musical background, as with black metal a lower production and a rawer recording quality are second nature. I record in near darkness, with only a few candles lighting up the keyboard.

Levi :

Are you currently signed to a record label, and if so how do you feel it has helped your musical career?

Choul :

Ethereal Mist is currently releasing through a Mexican black metal/dark ambient label known as Svart hat Productions (contact: svart.hat.prods@hotmail.com). Being on a distro label has definitely helped overall, especially in having physical tape releases available over just having songs uploaded on the internet. There are 2 releases available at the moment via Svart hat, a demo tape titled "Underneath the Tragic Moon" as well as a split tape with a dark ambient/ritualistic project known as Old Burial Temple (a side project of Old from Drottning, Woods of Desolation and Djinn). The split is titled "All is All/Transcendental Wanderings".

Levi :

What inspires you to write music for 'Ethereal Mist'?

Choul :

Ethereal Mist draws inspiration from the paranormal, the supernatural, the journey from life to death, and beyond. I also draw inspiration from nature, trancelike states and the greater cosmos.

Levi :

Is there an ideal time/place to listen to your music?

Choul :

Ethereal Mist is best listened to in isolation, in low light and at night when the spirits of the dead awaken.

Levi :

Are there any upcoming releases for 'Ethereal Mist'?

Choul :

Yes, there will be another split tape out soon with dark ambient project Vrasësinerëzve (from Bosnia and Herzegovina) which is a Les Légions Noires inspired project. The untitled split tape will be available via the Portuguese label, Black Cangrene Productions (contact: upontheabyss@gmail.com). There is also a 2nd tape demo/EP which was recorded a few days ago titled "The Sorrow is Eternal", as yet this tape doesn't have a scheduled release date or label.

Levi :

Where can our readers find out about new releases from 'Ethereal Mist'?

Choul :

Best source of upcoming releases/news would be via social media (Facebook) as well as Ethereal Mist's Soundcloud page:

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

<https://soundcloud.com/ethereal-mist-1>

Levi :

Any final words for the readers of Dungeons of Darkness?

Choul :

Thanks for taking the time to read this interview.

If you're an artist reading this, keep creating & never let anyone else tell you how your music "has to sound" and if you're a fan of the dungeon synth/dark ambient genres, keep listening to & supporting artists, be sure to buy their physical releases when able.

Together we dwell in the darkness... there is no light on this path.



Review of 'Mag Mor'

'Mag Mor' is the latest album released by dungeon synth band The Cromlech. The project - and this album - seem to be inspired very strongly by Celtic mythology, with a keen focus in this record on the prehistory of Gaul.

The album description reads :

"Mag Mor is the ancient gaellic word to "great plain" it refer to the world of the dead and spirits...

The mystic pilgrim also known as the mysterious wanderer travel trough time and land trying to reach this world now forgotten by mortals. he discribed its fantascic journey trough his subtiles melodies but only the one who listen by his heart can understand what he truly means... can you?"

Without further ado, let's examine what looks like a rather fascinating album!

01 - The crypt opened (10,000 after by mistaken)

(I think the parentheses in the title perhaps mean to say '10,000 years after by mistake', but that's what's on Bandcamp!)

A harp is the main melodic instrument throughout most of this piece, which starts out playing a simple melody which repeats, with some variation. In addition to other instruments (such as a very high-pitched bell sound and some low-register strings) providing harmonic accompaniment to the harp, the harp melody itself doesn't simply drone throughout the whole piece - a sign of more considered songwriting skill and a feature which makes this song interesting.

The piece ends with a very low-register riff played on the harp, brought to a close with the ringing of a small bell. Sparse instrumentation in this piece creates a great sense of atmosphere which will no doubt be familiar to anyone who's ever entered into a dungeon in a roleplaying game. And it's a very enjoyable feeling!

02 - Echo from the past (and far beyond)

As well as having the sound of howling wind in the background (which is rather evocative of the song's title), the main instruments in this song are a harp and some low-register brass instrument (which sounds like it could be an oboe). At the start of the piece the harp begins by playing a simple melody, with some variation, which will be a mainstay throughout most of the song. It is later joined by the oboe, which plays a simple harmonic accompaniment to the harp. Here, as in the first track, the artist does not hesitate to break the mould and change the riffs a little - he doesn't simply rely on repetitive minimalism.

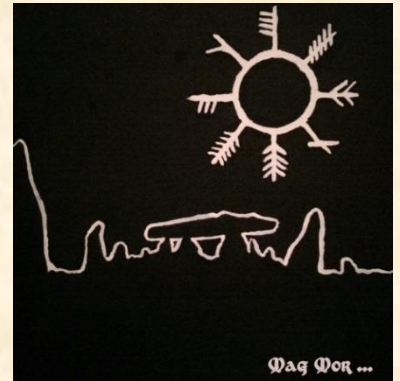
Around halfway through the piece, the harp drops out, leaving the oboe to play its harmonic accompaniment a little longer, before it too fades. But that isn't the end - it resurfaces along with the harp, playing an altogether new and faster-paced melody with a high-pitched organ accompanying them also.

That welcome melodic change later gives way to the harp and oboe doing the same harmonic dance they did from the start of the piece, with the same riff. And, just as the first section ended, so this track also ends with the harp dropping out and the oboe playing solo to a quick fade.

Although I felt the oboe (and to some extent the harp also) had too much attack to really bring out the theme of an 'Echo from the past', nonetheless this track was a quite enjoyable piece.

03 - The majesty of Ys Land (while sinking)

Trumpet blasts begin this rather dramatic piece, playing a simple riff which has enough variation to not be boring. This plays a couple of times, before a pan flute (and later some other instruments also) adopts that theme, and the brass changes to a lower register and provides harmonic accompaniment to the background of waves washing against a shore.



Later on this same instrumental layout is adopted for different riffs, and it works very well. In between the varied repetitions of the main riff there are small sections where the melody changes briefly, playing new things which almost sound improvised.

At the end of the piece, the pan flute changes to an extremely low register, and plays the initial motif to a very slow fade, with a bassy bubbling sound getting louder and louder, giving the image of a city sinking into the sea. It's a very evocative piece overall, simple yet satisfactorily complex at the same time.

04 - Ancient Gaëllic chivalery tradition (of the cromleck)

This is the only piece on the album to be based upon a drone - a simple melody in a relatively low register is played throughout the piece on what sounds like a dulcimer. Another dulcimer (or, at least another similar instrument) plays harmonies on top of it in a higher register, throughout most of the piece - and it is these harmonies which change and give the piece a sense of direction and fluidity. This second dulcimer never really disappears either, although at times it is overshadowed by loud brass instruments which occasionally enter the piece and provide additional harmonies.

However, all but the original dulcimer exit near the end of the piece, as the drone plays on its slow dirge to a fade. Harsh blowing winds in the background add a great deal of atmosphere to this piece, and the plodding nature of the drone lends it a very meditative feel that helps draw you into the past that *The Cromleck* seeks.

05 - Solstice sunset (at the old Cromleck)

The main riff of this piece is played at the beginning as at the end of the piece on a dulcimer. Although in the lower register it is a simple theme of only three notes, in the higher registers the dulcimer creates sweet harmonies on the initial theme which keep the piece from becoming stale.

Around halfway through the piece, the instrumentation changes, to the sound of harps, glockenspiels and some sort of deep brass instruments playing a soft and high-pitched melody utterly different and yet somehow related to the first. It is a hauntingly beautiful and dramatic break from the strong pace of the initial riff. After this brief interlude, the first motif returns, louder in volume and bolder in character. This time there is an even lower-register harmony played on the dulcimer also, giving a rich three-part harmony which exhudes power.

The outro of the piece is a new melody, played merely on dulcimer with a brass instrument of some description playing a harmonizing dirge, which gradually fades out. They hold one final note as the volume ultimately falls flat with the ending.

06 - Far away, a new star has born... (with life!)

Very atmospherically, the final piece of 'Mag Mor' begins with a low rumble and then the appearance of a bell-like synth playing a melody harmonized by a string pad - both of which sound relatively electronic and artificial but still quite enjoyable. The melody itself seems to almost be through-composed, with no distinct pattern to it, and this helps add to the mysterious feel of the piece. It takes a few iterant riffs here and there and changes them up and moves between them to the point where nothing is truly constant.

Around halfway through the piece the melody enters into a higher register, but playing musical riffs similar to those before it. All through it the string pad swirls in the background, adding a constant harmony which leaves no empty space. Indeed, when the piece (and the album) does yield to emptiness, it is these strings which fade to the silence.

Final Thoughts : 'Mag Mor' is a great album with a lot to recommend it. The songwriting is not the most advanced I've ever seen, but *The Cromleck* is clearly a more experienced songwriter and doesn't fall into many of the same clichés and pitfalls that many budding dungeon synth musicians do (which is quite a feat, as 'Mag Mor' appears to be his first album). The melodies are interesting, the songs well-crafted and the album atmospheric. Overall I'd give it three stars out of five (although I think it deserves more than three, but just less than four), and definitely recommend it to all the readers of *Dungeons of Darkness*.

-Levi Talvi

Interview with Narghaash

Levi :

What are your upcoming releases for Narghaash? Do you have any long-term goals/plans for this band?

Proscriptor :

The next release will be a Split EP with Swords of Numenor. Crabwich, the guy behind this project is a good friend of mine and you should check out his stuff. Also the "Fjellvanderen" EP / Demo will be released physically. It will be published by Hafsvad Records from the US and will be available as a CD.

I don't have any concrete long term goals. But I definitely want to keep on running the project because I've got many ideas in mind for upcoming releases, but I'm not able yet to put them into effect.

Levi :

Would you say your sound has changed since you were last interviewed for Dungeons of Darkness? If so, how and why?

Proscriptor :

Yes, it has. It's because I used very poor recording equipment during the "Durch Walder..." sessions. Now I use a new microphone. Also some new synthesizers are included in my newest songs. But still my music is low-fi and obscure. I want to keep the odd black metal atmosphere alive. I intend to create a more nordic atmosphere, too. The "Fjellvanderen" release was a first try. I also want to make more complex songs in the future and include a little bit of percussion and vocals. You will see...

Levi :

What advice would you give to those starting out in the dungeon synth genre?

Proscriptor :

You shouldn't expect to get rich or famous. Dungeon Synth is a small underground genre, maybe the smallest and the most unique I know. If you want to create dark, majestic, obscure or medieval atmosphere, give it a try. You mustn't buy expensive equipment for doing Dungeon Synth, because lots of artists are releasing very low-fi stuff. This is a part of the atmosphere, just like the old Black Metal demos and albums. Release demos, maybe do some splits with other Dungeon Synth musicians and get in contact with them. So I've started.

Levi :

What's your opinion of money in dungeon synth?

Proscriptor :

First of all, I think money shouldn't be important in music, at all. Especially in such a tiny subgenre as Dungeon Synth is. If you start doing Dungeon Synth with the intention to get money, then you are definitely in the wrong genre. It's all about creating music and atmosphere. I haven't earned much more than a few euros with Narghaash since 2013, but that's not important at all.

Levi :

Do you think you've benefited as a dungeon synth musician from being part of a record label? And if so, how?

Proscriptor :

I think if you're "signed" by a label it's a great benefit. They release your stuff and you have to care about nothing. Unfortunately, there aren't many labels in the Dungeon Synth genre... If you are part of a label, then you've got many things to do and manage. This process takes a lot of time! I think it depends on what do you exactly do for a label. I work working as a graphic designer for Hafsvad Record's upcoming releases. I can manage doing this and keep on making music. But I think if you're the head of a label you must focus on this, because it is a very underrated and hard work.

Levi :

Where can new readers and fans find your music?

Proscriptor :

You can find it on - www.obscurenarghaash.bandcamp.com .
You can also check my Facebook page - www.facebook.com/NarghaashDungeonSynth .

Levi :

Any final words?

Proscriptor :

Hails to all who are supporting and listening to Narghaash. Keep on supporting great Dungeon Synth artists such as Til Det Bergens Skyggene, Swords of Numenor, Foglord... And thanks for the interview.

'Neo-Classicism'

This article may wind up as more of a rant, which would be a first for this magazine, but it's all related, I assure you.

Dungeon synth, in taking from its black metal ancestry, has adopted the label of 'neo-classical' as an adjective to describe its music. People describe dungeon synth music and albums as 'neo-classical' if they are very repetitive, with the same riff repeating itself over and over again with little to no melodic variation.

Not only is this wrong, but it's almost the opposite of what's true!

Neo-classicism is a genre of music that became popular during the 1920's or so in Europe. As one might infer from the name (since the prefix 'neo' in Greek means 'new') the movement was about a revival of Classical Music. These musicians sought to emulate the more 'elegant' and 'refined' characteristics of the popular classical music composers (from the *actual* Classical Music era of around the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, I'm not referring to just any music played by an orchestra that sounds kind of complicated and virtuosic and that you usually hear on Classic FM - that's a rant for another time) such as Beethoven, Handel, Brahms, and Schubert. Classical Music itself sought to replicate the perceived elegance of the Greek and Roman ages (the Classical Age), and so they strove towards what they considered to be the highest and purest and best form of music (bear in mind of course that many Western powers at this time were creating empires and becoming colonial powers themselves, and therefore saw a great deal in the Romans).

In many ways it was a reaction to the excessive flair and creativity that had arisen during the preceding Romantic period of Western music - in which unusual orchestral arrangements, unapologetic use of accidentals for effect and a large emphasis on fantastical themes and concepts - that Neo-Classical music sought to bring a sort of order to music of the day. It emphasised more usual rhythms, less over-the-top dynamics (trying to avoid an effect like Wagnars - for during one of his concerts the volume was so intense that the roof was reported to shake), and placed higher importance upon counterpoint (each musical instrument in an orchestral score having a distinct melody which is interesting on its own) than upon the individual virtuosic performance of any single musician. In addition, Neo-Classicalists often used the Classical orchestra arrangement but used combinations of instruments in different ways. With a few exceptions, this kind of style does not describe the majority of dungeon synth music out there today!

Therefore it is certainly **NOT** a term fit to describe music which repeats a lot, so stop using it in this context! Music critics may simply call that 'repetition'. And, one could argue that the term 'minimalism' might be suitable here, although personally I tend to reserve that for describing music with a markedly thin texture.

One could make the argument that it doesn't matter if people are using the term 'neo-classical' incorrectly, so long as everyone in the dungeon synth community (and the black metal community, where it's also frequently applied) understand what the term means to them and can use it effectively to communicate. And, they're right.

Really, I'm only writing about this because it is a phenomenon which annoys me, and which I would like to share my thoughts on. I likely wouldn't be so annoyed if it weren't for the fact that (as I said in the beginning) the use of the phrase 'neo-classical' in describing dungeon synth music is done completely contrary to its original and true meaning!

Ironically, one might garner from my comments in album reviews that I would actually like to see a sort of neo-classical element enter into dungeon synth. To some extent, that's true, but that's just my personal preference. I love that dungeon synth is a relatively wide tent of a genre, with lots of different styles accommodated. Some acts, especially newer ones, tend to be more repetitive and minimalist, etc. And, that can be great music! I do, however, appreciate slightly more the artists who create music with polyphony and counterpoint and wide changes in dynamics and texture. To me personally it speaks of the artist's creativity : and if there's one quality I seek to encourage in all aspects of life, it's creativity!

-Levi Talvi

Review Of 'A Long Way home'

As it says on the Bandcamp page : “‘A Long Way home’ is the first full-length album of Forgotten Pathways...” - an awakening of the project after its long hiatus since releasing the well-respected ‘Shrouded In Mystery’ demo. The album itself is inspired heavily by fairy tales - particularly the Germanic kind such as those of the Brothers Grimm - and this is reflected both in the song titles and in the album art itself.



It is available for order on CD (complete with a booklet of artwork) or digital download from this link :

<https://forgottenpathways.bandcamp.com/releases>

So, let's explore this thrilling world of fantastical adventure!

01 - Intro

The intro to this album is not a piece of music, but an ambient track, with the sound of what appears to be a marching army near the sea. And at the end, one hears the creaking sound of a large door opening - an appropriate entrance to this mysterious album!

02 - Bury Me Under The Juniper Tree

Although most of this piece is based on a drone, one would be hard-pressed to pick it out : the instrumentation and melodies shift in marvellous ways throughout the song. The low-register double bass plays an Alberti bassline throughout most of the song, which provides a foundation upon which the rest of the song is constructed. It is usually accompanied by strings in a higher register, playing gentle melodies with little attack and great atmosphere.

At one point earlier in the song the strings and double bass are joined by a flute (which appears in other parts of the song also) playing a parallel melody one octave above the main. This a brilliant device which manages to make a melody which was once secure and comforting sound threatening and evil, truly reflecting the transient nature of fairy tale narratives.

Halfway through the song a harp (as many other instruments do also) joins and plays a melody harmonizing with the main which soon becomes a force of its own. This, as with most melodies in the song, is subject to variation, and this change makes the whole song interesting to listen to. Moreover, the composer manages three-part harmonies (if not more complex ones) throughout the whole song and, as mentioned before with the triton, is able to use changing harmonies, instrumentation and melodies to convey complex moods and changes in mood to the listener. Within this single song the listener goes between excitement, fear, calm and much else - this is truly a feat of excellent songwriting and bodes well for the rest of the album!

03 - The Evil Queen

Keeping with the dramatic tone of the album art (and, elements of the preceding song), this piece starts out with a brass line in a low register quite reminiscent of classical music. The motif it is based upon is transient, and soon replaced not only by other melodies but by other instruments also. An appealingly childlike glockenspiel soon joins the mix and plays a varying melody along to the accompaniment of bells, strings and a rather atmospheric drum with a deep and ponderous sound. The glistening tone of the glockenspiel in particular, atop all the other instruments which usually manage to fade from the listener's focus and feel like a fog in a dense forest, brings a sense of mystery and magic to this piece.

But the composer never lets us forget the title of this song - ‘The Evil Queen’ - and certainly the mood throughout the whole piece projects power, pomp and terror. Towards the end of the piece the tempo of the song seems to increase ever-so-slightly,

and the volume rises in a crescendo aided by the thickening texture of the piece, as brass, string and percussive instruments join together to deliver a pounding rhythm which certainly conjures to mind visions of a mighty ruler with a wicked heart. The composition throughout this whole piece remains stellar - the melodies change constantly (the piece indeed sounds through-composed) and none of them are boring, or structured poorly with the harmonic elements of the song. In addition, the various atmospheric elements added towards the end of the song - strange sounds that bear no resemblance to anything familiar or comforting - reinforce the sense of fantasy until the song ends dramatically with the shattering of glass.

04 - Dornröschen Sleep

From the beginning, the atmosphere of this piece is emphasized by the harsh sounds of rain and a howling wind in the distance. Then the music begins with a piano playing a repeating riff, later joined by a string pad which plays a more simplistic harmony. Soon, percussion instruments join also and accentuate the rhythm of the song.

As with other pieces on this album, the music itself is ever changing, and never boring. It alternates between being dominated by percussive instruments with great attack, or by softer instruments with less. Towards the end, a general theme can be seen - it becomes dramatic, more symphonic and bombastic. There is a piercingly sharp contrast between the extremely high-pitched piano parts and the deep booming brass parts, all to the violent rhythm of the drums. Despite this rather grandiose theme, the song actually fades out slowly.

05 - The Tomb Of A King

With the pounding of deep (and slightly electrified) drums, this piece sounds rather more like an industrial song than a dungeon synth one, although it is nonetheless quite atmospheric and soon leads into a mix of percussive string instruments playing a rather Oriental-sounding melody to the backdrop of strings. The instruments weave between each other in a very impressive manner, all keeping time to the beat of those same slow plodding drums.

Despite the still-impressive songwriting on this piece, I didn't like it as much. I felt it didn't really have as much atmosphere as the others, and the stringed instruments sounded almost as if they were repeating the same thing, and their parts weren't particularly interesting to listen to. And, as the instruments fade away at the end of the piece, I almost felt relieved.

06 - To New Shores

This piece starts out with a rather ominous riff played by strings and brass, which is soon augmented by a harp playing a higher-pitched melody above it, all at a rather low volume. Before long, the drums join in, all the instruments increase in volume, and begin playing a variation on that initial melody. Foremost among all of these is a beautiful violin - the sound of which is captivating.

Here, as with other songs on the album, the music doesn't rely on boring repetition and changes constantly, moulding into new and beautiful forms. All of the different parts are expertly harmonized also, and there is a great deal of counterpoint (ie, the lower harmonic accompaniments are actually melodies in their own right). At the end of the song that dulcimer violin joined the mix again, playing an emotional harmony above the other instruments as they all gradually faded away - it was only at this moment that I felt the piece truly invoked the sensation of sailing to new shores.

07 - A horses head

For some reason I can't quite put my finger on, this song reminds me a lot of the old dungeon synth band Dolch. It is layered with many beautiful instruments in many different registers - flutes and strings and brass and percussion all mixed into one. The rhythm of the piece is, for the most part slow, but agreeable. And the polyphony and counterpoint is excellent here - throughout most of this song the composer uses independent melodies in contrary motion yet in complete harmony. The melody, of course, never gets stale, but changes in a lively fashion throughout the piece. By using changes of instrumentation the composer in this piece brings out ominous elements and adventurous ones alike.

Around midway through the song these ominous elements become more evident - the composer uses a great contrast between low and high pitched instruments in a growing crescendo with an uneasy musical motif. As if running in fear, the tempo of

the piece speeds up into an outright run, as the drums come in hard and everything speeds up, until a great crash. There are also a great many key changes in this section of the song - quite a rare gem of songwriting skill in dungeon synth! This loud-and-fast ominous section crashes (with a cymbal) into a quieter, slower, yet equally scary finale, which leads the listener on with brass and woodwind to a gentle fade, culminating in a defiant gasp of the brass which cuts the piece off.

08 - The Forbidden Door

'The Forbidden Door', in keeping with its name, is a very ominous piece. It starts out as such, with low register strings playing a haunting riff, which is soon developed not by the instruments themselves, but by changes in the texture - more instruments are added gradually, each playing their own harmony and variation upon the same central theme. This rises into a crescendo, aided greatly by the drumbeat which gradually fades in. Throughout the rest of the piece the same brilliant composition shines through, with different melodies being taken and played with all the way to the dramatic crescendo with a hugely thick texture upon which the piece ends. Upon reflection, 'The Forbidden Door' rather reminds me of the door to the other world in the novel and movie *Coraline*.

09 - Her Frozen Palace

Whereas all the other pieces on this album exhibit a very strong influence from classical music (which is greatly appreciated, at least by this writer!), this track is more obviously influenced by black metal music. One can see this not only in the composition (which, here, is more repetitive than most other tracks, as single themes are kept to and developed for longer, although this is definitely not a bad thing, as the change and contrast is a nice compliment to the rest of the album) but also in the inclusion of a highly distorted synth guitar, which plays simple power chord accompaniments for various sections in the song. Although I don't personally love the guitar sound itself (because, to my ears it sounds very hissy and is too loud in comparison to the other instruments, unnecessarily so considering that it is one of the most static and boring instrumental lines in the sections where it plays), it definitely adds a great deal of atmosphere to this song. Even so, the composition on this song remains impressive also, and although there is a slight thematic change one can still see the composer's wonderful skill come forth.

10 - Cohort Of The Lost

The finale of this piece seems to have a strong influence from the band *Dark Ages* - it features percussion and percussive instruments quite prominently, as well as rather high-pitched instruments drawing a sharp contrast with the lower-pitched strings which provide harmonies throughout most of the song. There are also many non-musical ambient sounds used to great effect in this piece - the hammer of an anvil, the crashing of metal, etc. This piece goes through different sections with a wide variety of instruments, from lutes to bagpipes to recorders, as if to remind the listener one last time of all this composer is capable of.

'Cohort Of The Lost' draws the album to a close with a deceptive gradual diminuendo which eventually rises again, with flutes, harps, strings (and loud percussion instruments) playing a new but unusually repetitive motif which fades out all other instruments slowly, so that by the end the harp is pre-eminent. Then, with an ominous crash of the cymbals, silence falls.

Final Thoughts : 'A Long Way home' is one of my two absolute favourite dungeon synth albums I've heard this year, and it's one of the most impressive I've seen in a long time. I considered the 'Shrouded In Mystery' demo by Forbidden Pathways (from 1998) to be quite impressive and most enjoyable even then, but after the long hiatus this musician has truly blossomed! The level of technical and compositional skill on this album is breathtaking - it is a feat reminiscent of the classical composers, and so rarely found in the dungeon synth community. This artist weaves together many different styles in a patchwork quilt which is spectacularly beautiful to behold. Another factor which I neglected to emphasize in the review is that the production on this album is superb! The instruments are almost always well mixed and mastered, changing tempos and keys are done well, without obscuration. And, most of all, the digital instruments are of stellar quality. I don't know what virtual instruments this composer was using, but I wish I could have them! I give this album five stars out of five, and I encourage everyone reading this to go buy 'A Long Way home' from the Bandcamp link listed at the start of this review. You won't be disappointed!

-Levi Talvi



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Sword-And-Sorcery Stuff

In this issue of Dungeons of Darkness, for the 'Sword-And-Sorcery Stuff' part I'm going to talk about something which has had a significant impact on the shape of the magazine itself. That is, palaeography.

Before I explain what palaeography means, let me tell you how it has impacted the magazine. For those readers who are here because they read the first two editions of Dungeons of Darkness, you'll notice an obvious change - the font. I used to use Old English font which comes with Microsoft Word, because I thought that it looked the most Medieval out of all the fonts there were, and especially with the parchment-esque background I felt it added flavour and atmosphere to the magazine. Worst of all, I put it in italics, since I thought at the time that this more closely replicated Medieval handwriting. Oh, how wrong I was! Although Old English font does, in fact, replicate to some degree the Gothic font in many Medieval manuscripts, it's not fully authentic, and it results in a 'wall of text' which is quite difficult to read (especially since at the time I wrote it in a very small font). Later, when trying to read Medieval documents for myself, I discovered the topic palaeography, and fell in love.

Palaeography comes from the Greek words 'palaeo' (meaning 'old') and 'graphos' (meaning 'writing'), and it is the study of writing in the past upon soft materials (such as parchment, papyrus and paper). It is not to be confused with epigraphy, which is the study of writing in the past upon hard materials (such as stone, metal or wood). Palaeography is the study primarily of handwriting from the past, but also of the format of the written word, how books were constructed and laid out, etc.

It is a remarkably complex, yet intriguing subject. So much so that I very nearly decided to apply to study the Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic course at Cambridge (which also includes optional classes in Latin and palaeography - it is in fact the only university course to teach palaeography at an undergraduate level).

Palaeography encompasses the study of how people wrote in Antiquity (so, the classical era of the Roman empire) all the way up to the Renaissance and beyond. Interestingly enough, some linguistic anthropologists argue that in a century or so, because computers and digital text has become so commonplace, only palaeographers will be able to read handwriting anymore!

The new font used in this issue of Dungeons of Darkness is, in fact, a palaeographic font! It is modelled on the writing of Eadwig Basan, whose writing in the Carolingian minuscule script is especially clear and well-respected among those of Medieval scribes of the 11th century. The name of the font is Eadui, after the Latinized version of Eadwig, and you can download it for your own personal use here :

<http://openfontlibrary.org/en/font/eadui>

If you want to discover more about palaeography for the Latin alphabet (the palaeography of Arabic especially and other scripts such as Chinese and Japanese are studied academically, but I know nothing about them), the book 'Latin Palaeography - Antiquity and the Middle Ages' by Bernhard Bischoff, and this website are good places to start learning :

<http://bartholomew.stanford.edu/welcome.html>

With these resources, you can learn to write the same way they did in the Middle Ages and Antiquity - and there's nothing quite so atmospheric as copying old texts by candle/lamp light while listening to your favourite dungeon synth album!

In fact, on the very last page of this magazine (after the Credits and Contacts page) I've included a picture from a Medieval text so you can see a little bit of what palaeography is about. The image itself is taken from Fiore dei Liberi's book 'Florus de arte Luctandi' - a book which teaches Medieval fighting techniques (using all the 'knightly' weapons) from the late 14th century, and the text above gives instructions on what a fighter should do in such a position (written in Latin). Enjoy!

-Levi Talvi

Review of 'Kingdom Of Erang'



'Kingdom of Erang' is the latest album by Erang. You can buy it from Erang's Bandcamp page here :

<https://erang.bandcamp.com/album/kingdom-of-erang>

The theme of this album is the Kingdom of Erang, and to that effect it comes with a book of pictures and short stories depicting life in the Kingdom, as well as a beautiful map outlining the different places - many of which have been referenced in older Erang albums and in this one also. The map is really well-drawn and looks great as a desktop background, which really helps bring the Kingdom of Erang to life in one's head.

So let's examine the songs of the 'Kingdom of Erang' then :

01 - All The Beauty We've Lost

Introducing the first riff of this piece on a very gentle flute, soon this song brings a dramatic start to the album - with the crash of cymbals and the pounding of drums, various other instruments are introduced all at once, playing variations upon and harmonies of that initial riff. It's a beautiful tune itself, and Erang uses a digital distorted guitar synth here also, but it is very quiet and really serves to dramatize the background of the piece rather than draw the listener's attention - that is always upon the melodic strings and flutes.

Around halfway through the piece the strings break off from the initial melody to play a slower-paced and very soulful tune, which all of a sudden drops out. It is replaced by the flutes playing the same harmony as they played for the initial melody, but a stringed instrument here plays a melody related to it, yet almost distinct.

Then, with that beat of the drums and the crunch of the guitar, that first riff returns. As in the beginning, it has spoken word which contains the phrase "All the beauty we've lost" and other unintelligible phrases. All at once the instruments stop, and the reverb on the vocals disappears slowly, until the strings play a satisfying perfect cadence to end the piece.

02 - My Mother Moon

'My Mother Moon' is an unusual track, in that it appears to contain elements of older Erang tracks while still showing signs of development. Erang is certainly not a band whose style remains stagnant - his 2014 album 'We Are The Past' indicates that he is certainly willing to experiment. After a glissando intro on a harp (skilfully faded in), the piece starts with very 'tribal' sounding human singing, always singing the same two notes - potentially a sample. This then continues alongside a harp which sounds very bouncy and quite akin to that used on his Tome albums. The use of the human voice in such a capacity here is something very rarely - if ever - in dungeon synth (unless you count MIDI wordless choirs, I've never heard the human voice singing in dungeon synth before) and I salute Erang for this effort, as it certainly paid off.

The second section of the song then begins after the first has repeated a few times. Using a different theme to the first, it took a single motif and repeated it in ways that did not render the tune alien but interesting, as with the first section.

The ending of this song was rather beautiful : a flute playing a harmonizing variation upon the main theme of the second section suddenly swaps to a soothing xylophone, which plays that same harmony one more time to bring the piece to an end.

03 - The Lady Of The Greenberry Lodge

'The Lady Of The Greenberry Lodge' was one of my favourite pieces on this whole album. Part of that may have been the fact that it featured heavy use of the harpsichord - my favourite instrument. But the song has much to offer besides that - the melodies are interesting and well-harmonized. In particular, this song creates a very strong Medieval atmosphere that makes me feel almost as if I'm relaxing in a tavern.

One of the only problems I have with it is the fact that one of the new sections (as opposed to the sections based on the riff from the start of the piece, which recurs three times in the song) starts as if it were a completely new song. Almost all the instrumentation drops out except for drums and a Jew's harp, and they play a simple rhythm and then entirely fade out. And, for a second there is silence. Until the new part comes in on flute and strings (which, for the record, sounded beautiful and well-written). The new part even sounds as if it's in a different key. Anyone listening to it would be convinced that one song has ended and a new one begun. Maybe that was the artist's intent, but I don't feel it did too much good for me.

That notwithstanding, it didn't tarnish the quality of the song, which I still regard as excellent!

04 - Our Legend

With a strong brass element alongside the strings, this piece sounds more similar to film music than most other songs on this album do. The harmonies throughout most of the piece are surprisingly simple (often only two-part) yet effective, and the songwriting shows innovation and creativity. Most of the song actually sounds as if it consists of variations upon a single melodic theme, and this illustrates Erang's strength as a songwriter, that he can take a single melody and bring the listener to all sorts of places with it. Especially with the strong, pounding percussion, 'Our Legend' conjures up images of heroic battles and clashes of great armies in a Tolkienesque world.

05 - The Underwater Zeppelin Whale

There are two sections of this song, both of which are based off of drones, upon which is added many different instruments creating beautiful harmonies. In the first part of the song there is a gradual crescendo, with a thickening tempo and a very grandiose soundscape being created. Curiously enough, in both parts of the song it is the harp which plays the drone of the song, and strings and other instruments which augment it. Noticeably, this song is quite well produced - sounds fade in and out with remarkable fluidity, and the sound of all the instruments is really quite pleasing.

06 - Then The Mocked Prince Became A Drunken Tyrant

In this piece, for most of the song the jovial upbeat tone of the glockenspiel/xylophone is contrasted with the rather more sinister strings and brass playing in a lower register. These play the same riff over and over again almost as a drone, and although at points in the song they change over to an acoustic double bass, the notes they play still remain the same. As well as the instrumentation, throughout this song Erang uses changes in rhythm and frequent accidentals to draw a contrast between the two states of the king - the mocked prince who then morphs into a drunken tyrant. In addition, whenever sections change in the song (including at the end), there is a sample of rather ominous laughter which heightens the atmosphere of this piece.

07 - Dawn Of The Stone Giants

This is another one of (if not my absolute) favourite songs on this album! 'Dawn Of The Stone Giants' is based on a single riff (which, of course, is developed), one which is sublimely beautiful and worth hearing over and over again! The main melody is played on a flute for most of the song, and strings provide beautiful harmonic accompaniment. While still provoking a sense of grandeur, this song is incredibly soulful and peaceful and relaxing. With a strong fantasy flavour to it, this seventh track stands out as the cornerstone of 'Kingdom of Erang', and is one of the most graceful and serene dungeon synth songs I have ever heard.

08 - Where The Grey Legion Fell

Distant snare and bass drums set the military theme while introducing this piece. Although the percussive instruments are often fairly faint, they're still recognizable throughout most of the song, while the piano plays continuing variations upon the same riff in a dirge which seems to lament the fall of the Grey Legion. There is a lot of reverb on this piece, rather appropriate for the mood of it, and with the piano sound these lingering tones soon form a strange swirling mist in the soundscape which greatly enhances the atmosphere of the piece.

Incidentally, there are relatively few instruments and relatively simple harmonies (ie, I don't think there's anything in this piece more complex than two or three-part harmonies), so this piece could be very nicely adapted for solo piano performance, and would be quite atmospheric at just that. Indeed, it is in this manner that the song ends, the piano moving the riff upwards to a simple and tearful end.

09 - Night Of The Troll

With gentle and soothing melodies played on a glockenspiel and accompanied by a pan flute, 'Night Of The Troll' sounds rather like a dungeon synth lullaby! The texture of this song is actually the thinnest of any song on the album, as only those two instruments ever play at once, and the harmonies are usually two-part. In many ways, this helps to make the song feel peaceful and secure, and it still feel quite magical in its own way.

10 - Innocent Blood, Barbarian Blade

This track is through-composed - another indication of Erang's impressive songwriting skills and something I'd like to see more of in dungeon synth generally. Each riff is given its own section of the song, with distinct instrumentation. At first it is a harp and flute, then a dulcimer and deep booming strings. Next comes a rather ominous brass part, followed by a very peaceful bit on solo harp. The ending is a rather atmospheric part which sounds like it's played on Viking horns. The melodies themselves are captivating and well-written, as they usually are on this album. And although the transition between parts of this song can seem a bit jarring because of the change in instrumentation it is done fairly well, and as a consequence 'Innocent Blood, Barbarian Blade' does indeed feel like a complete and co-ordinated track.

11 - Metal Machine Dragon

One of the riffs in this piece - which starts out with a dulcimer (or similar stringed instrument) playing a developing riff - sounds somewhat similar to one of the riffs in the preceding song. But this is a forgivable mistake that any songwriter would make, and maybe I'm wrong in asserting that there's significant similarity.

In keeping with the name of the song, 'Metal Machine Dragon' is quite dramatic, with a great deal of paced but powerful brass lines cleverly harmonized in the different registers and sometimes joined by a deep bass drum. Also, in the background there is the quiet yet audible sound of hammers pounding on anvils, as if to bring to the listener's mind the construction of this great metal machine dragon.

12 - Thirteen Runes Over The Gate Of Kolm

In my estimation this piece sounds like the 'Monastery Chapel' track from the Gothic 2 soundtrack. It starts out with an unsurprising yet pleasant organ playing a relatively simple and slow melody which develops and changes as the piece goes on. Although it is certainly always there through most of the piece, the organ is certainly not a drone, and its melody changes frequently, despite often returning to the initial theme.

This piece exudes a sense of religious calm. Listening to it feels almost as if one were giving worship in the church of a fantasy world to fantastical gods and goddesses. The melodies are simplistic but nice to listen to, and the tranquillity of this piece is a nice change with and contrast to the other pieces, many of which lean on the more bombastic and energetic side of things.

The piece ends with a change in instrumentation, not in melody. The organ switches to a harp and strings, which play the initial melody again to a soft and slow fade. The tune of this song truly touched me and I find myself humming it often.

13 - Recovering The Beauty

Following on from the previous piece, 'Recovering The Beauty' maintains a tranquil and peaceful atmosphere. There are no sudden flashes in tempo, no drastic changes in instrumentation, sharp accidentals or even any key changes. It begins with a shimmering and somewhat modern-sounding strings pad which plays an extremely slow-paced meditative tune. This, in my opinion, makes the piece feel distinctly spiritual, although I don't normally feel that way about such an artificial and modern tone.

The strings pad is soon accompanied by two flutes, one in a higher register than the other. The two flutes and the strings then perform a beautiful dance of counterpoint, with intricately interwoven melodies each with their own *raison d'être* and contribution to the song. It is blissfully relaxing and calming to listen to.

About halfway through the song these instruments all drop out to be replaced by a lone harp playing a varying melody around a single theme which frequently ends on a chord in the lower register of the harp.

But this leaves eventually, and the strings return on their own. The difference between the harp (which has strong attack and a relatively quick decay) compared to the string pad (which has very weak attack, almost a fade-in, but is sustained) is pronounced and interesting.

The music of this penultimate piece ends with the string pad holding a single note for a very long time, as it slowly fades away. However, the track does not end there - afterwards there are the faint sounds of wildlife for half a minute. Birds singing in trees, animals howling in the distance, the babble of a brook. To me this is symbolism - you can view the song almost as a spell cast to bring life and fecundity back to the Kingdom of Erang, and the sounds of life that follow the end of that rather religious spell demonstrate its success.

14 - Down The Moray Eel River

This is the final piece of the album - a bonus track granted only to those who buy it. And boy, is it worthwhile!

This last track maintains the slow pace of the previous two, starting off with an organ playing a simple riff in a low register. That same shimmering strings pad from before soon joins in playing a harmony line on top in a higher register. This continues for a while until the organ and strings pad (still playing a variation upon the same initial melody) are joined by an electric guitar. Unlike the other one on the album, this guitar isn't heavily distorted background noise, but plays its own melodic tunes above the other instruments. Continuing for most of the piece, the guitar really comes to the centre and despite being an unusual sound in dungeon synth it really augments the song.

At the end, the guitar drops out, and all that remains is the organ playing in a very low register. It is soon joined by what sounds like a harp or an acoustic guitar, and they play parallel melodies in harmony together, ending entwined on one last note which they hold to fade. Hearing that really feels like the end of a journey, like coming home after long travels and a great adventure in the Kingdom of Erang.

Final Thoughts: 'Kingdom of Erang' is an amazingly brilliant album! It's my favourite dungeon synth album of 2015, and I've found myself listening to it over and over again, discovering something new each time. The songs are well constructed and complex yet memorable. The harmonies are expertly done, as is the production. There aren't any 'filler' songs on this album, and each song is a gem worth remembering. All throughout the album there is an amazing ambience and atmosphere. In addition to the great music itself, the album comes with a great digital map of the Kingdom of Erang, as well as an enthralling PDF booklet of short stories and artwork by Erang himself. It really helps you get immersed more and more in the world that he weaves.

Overall, I would give this album five stars out of five, and I would highly recommend all the readers of Dungeons of Darkness to buy it at the Bandcamp link given at the start of the album. You need this in your dungeon synth collection!

-Levi Talvi

Interview with Ranscur

Levi :

Tell us a bit about your musical background.

Ranscur :

Well it's a pretty long idiotic story at this point but you know, I was into metal pretty early on and I played a little classical. In 2003 I started a few projects one was noisy metal and the other I was mixing dark ambient and folk, and I was also learning to play keys around that time. My main project for many years was called Emptying Place. Over the years I've drifted a lot more into playing noise and blues, which is a story for a different day maybe, but I've always kept a metal or metal related project going. I've never really been the type of person to just become obsessed with one or two styles so I'm always trying something different. When I got burned out on playing metal I jumped into dungeon synth. Currently I'm also playing in a group called human Adult Band, and also doing some work just under my name, Justin A. Mank.

Levi :

What bands have influenced Ranscur?

Ranscur :

Well I got into dungeon synth the usual way, like getting into Mortuis, Burzum, Summoning, Ildjarn, and Vond in the early 2000s, and they've had the biggest impact on Ranscur. Back then I had no idea there were so many other projects, I'd never heard of Depressive Silence for example. Nobody was talking about this kind of music except maybe to talk shit about Varg. But getting into Andrew's blog and checking out the newer stuff the project that affected me the most was Abandoned Places. But also Lord Lovidicus, Til Det Bergens Skyggene, Skarpscian, and Narghaash. I might also mention Trollman Av Ildtoppberg, everybody should check them out, that mix of drone, funeral doom, and dungeon synth has never been replicated. Plus Dead Can Dance and Skepticism.

Levi :

Is there a particular reason you favor the very low-fi sound in Ranscur?

Ranscur :

Well in 2013 when I started Ranscur I was just wrapping up a metal project I'd done for many years, Cold Furnace. That project was always geared towards playing metal in an unusual way, like I used no drums and some influences from blues and noise, I played shows alone, stuff like that. So I was coming from a background of basically not giving a shit about orthodoxy in metal. So when I had the idea to start playing dungeon synth my first thought was that I had to have my own sound. I didn't want to play something too weird but I didn't want it to sound like Mortuis too much either. Abandoned Places sort of gave me an idea, maybe abstractly, because that project was so dissonant, it was so much more extreme than any other dungeon synth I'd heard. So I decided to keep it raw but you know, like beyond tape hiss. I wanted the hiss to be like another instrument almost, to swallow you up hypnotically. And anyway absurdity is important to me in dungeon synth, just the ridiculous nature of the style in general. I wanted to do something even more ridiculous than usual. I'm glad people have been into it because I knew it would probably be controversial.

Levi :

Why did you choose the name 'Ranscur'?

Ranscur :

It's partly arbitrary, it's a kind of polearm. I chose it because I remembered it from when I used to play dungeons and dragons like 13 or 14 years ago. Nostalgia is important for me for this project and I mean nostalgia for a lot of things, whether it's my early metal days like seeing Dio when I was 15, or when I was 14 into D&D and fantasy novels. So it plays into those feelings.

Levi :

How do you record your music, and what music editing software do you use?

Ranscur :

I use a tape recorder and various lo-fi mics. I guess I'd rather not explain entirely how I get my particular sound, I can tell you it took me a long time to figure out how to do it. It's easy to just distort the hell out of something, but to get it clear on one hand and raw on the other took a lot of experimentation. I don't edit much in software, just a little eq and I use audacity. I don't use a better program because I don't need to. I don't use midi at all.

Levi :

How do you write your music?

Ranscur :

I just sit down at a synth and play. Because I don't overdub I don't have to record one part and then take a step back and figure out what the next layer will be. I'm not really a big fan of the overdubbing process, I used to do it that way years back though and of course I listen to a lot of music that uses overdubbing. I just like the idea of being able to sit down and play and write a whole song right there in the moment.

Levi :

What is your opinion on money in dungeon synth?

Ranscur :

Well I see this has become a point of contention lately. The simple answer is that I don't really care either way. When I first started Ranscur and checked out the whole dungeon synth revival and how it was functioning I was happy there was less emphasis on money than usual. Really dungeon synth is the only style I've been involved with where you can be taken seriously without physical albums and without worrying at all about money, and I felt like that was refreshing. I mean playing metal you are bound to lose money just sending your demo to labels, I mean with the postage. I'm just glad I haven't lost any money. Right now I'm leaving my stuff for free, I'd rather have fifty people download it and make ten dollars than have ten people download it and make fifty dollars. If I thought maybe I could make a few thousand dollars with this maybe I'd be singing a different tune, but forty dollars just isn't enough to sway me. But I think other people should do it however they want.

Levi :

Are you currently signed to a record label, and if so how does it benefit you?

Ranscur :

I'm not, I was talking to Mithrim last year but after they folded I haven't found one. I'm considering working with a label possibly for some splits that are forth coming or the next album. I may self-release my last album Sage in the Tall hills because I was really happy with how it came out but I haven't decided yet.

Levi :

Is there a particular setting in which your music should be listened to?

Ranscur :

No I don't think so. I definitely think dungeon synth creates a weird feeling that other styles general don't, at least in me. But however someone wants to amplify that is up to them. I'm even considering doing this live but it would have to be the right gig.

Levi :

Where can the readers of Dungeons of Darkness find your music?

Ranscur :

<https://ranscur.bandcamp.com/>

I have a recent release and I should have some more soon. You can also search for my facebook page. Anyone who wants to get in touch for whatever reason can email me at :

styrofoamcretin@yahoo.com

Levi :

Any last words?

Ranscur :

Thanks for the interview and thanks to everybody who has checked out Ranscur.



What does the fan say?

For those unfamiliar with the second edition of Dungeons of Darkness, 'What does the fan say?' is a section where the voices of the dungeon synth community are heard. Because I'm also the admin of the Dungeon Synth Facebook page (which you can like and follow at the following web address : <https://www.facebook.com/DarkMedievalAmbient>), I have access to a wide number of dungeon synth fans. And, as a result, I can ask their opinion on various issues. In 'What does the fan say?' I share to the readers of Dungeons of Darkness the opinions of some of their fellow music fans on a particular issue pertaining to dungeon synth, the topic chosen by myself. Although there were fewer responses in this edition than the last, I should note that all of the comments here had many likes, so it's likely that many other dungeon synth people agreed and felt no need to repeat what these commenters had said.

In this edition the topic is :

What do you think about money in dungeon synth?

I think it's necessary to sell your work and buy the other's work too, if it has a reasonable price. It helps to keep the "scene" alive. The commercial thing isn't about selling/buying, but something related to the content and purpose behind the works. Also, I'm not against piracy or artists who like to give or share their work for free, these things are somewhat necessary if you think in a globalized world. Or one thing I enjoy is trading stuff. Anyway, I think it's all about freedom, but balance too.

-Anonymous

People always get the wrong idea about money, things should be given the price that they're really worth, whether it's a few dollars, a few hundred, etc. And with all the free Bandcamp/Soundcloud/YouTube "Albums" being pushed around how can you expect to get decent content?

And as an artist you are not obligated to turn all your hard work and effort into a free MP3, nor make buddies to have your music heard....Music is sinking and surrendering to the cyber digital prison where every artist and everything is worth the same, where everything turns to simple data to live and die briefly...if at all.

-Anonymous

No one should work at their art and hone their craft only to give it away for free. That's not to say many fans don't expect to get music for free (just try selling records these days! ha ha) but it really shouldn't be expected. You would tell your boss to fuck off if he said "I really like your work but I'm not gonna pay you for what you did last week". Well a musician, painter, illustrator, etc. works for many hours creating a tangible thing not to mention 100s and 1000s of hours getting their skills to a point where they can create that thing. If people truly admire what you do they should be willing to pay less than the amount of a meal at a restaurant or an expensive coffee to own your album.

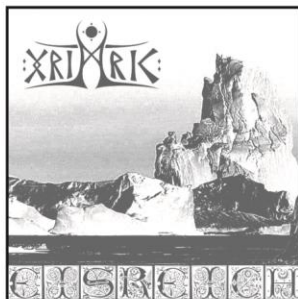
-Anonymous

As a musician and fan, I am against free download and the notion that art should be free to avoid becoming commercial.

In the era of digital download anyone can have access to almost anything without paying for it, regardless of the value and quality of the work itself; giving an amount of money is acknowledging the work's quality and the artist's effort behind it, which to me is essential to keep an underground scene alive. I also think art should be affordable for everyone willing to support the artist. This is the reason why I charge a very small price for digital, letting people pay more if they want, and I'm very open about trades.

-Anonymous

XRIMRIK



'Eisreich'

- download: 4 eur
- tape: 6.50 eur (limited to 50 - few remaining)
- compact disc: sold out !

"Masterful sound choices, clever build ups, and an overwhelming coldness. All of the genius of songs like 'Tomhet' (by Burzum) has been recaptured on Eisreich"
- Heathen Harvest



coming soon on 6-panel-digipack compact disc:

'DIE MAUERN DER NACHT'



grimrik.bandcamp.com

Interview with Grimrik

Spooky Griff :

First of all, Grimrik, I'd like to thank you for giving this interview - is this the first time you've been interviewed separately from Arach?

Grimrik :

Depending on when this interview will be released: yes, this is the first long public interview I do alone - thanks for your interest in doing this!

Spooky Griff :

You've spoken before about your dissatisfaction with many of the modern Dungeon Synth releases today. Could you expand on that a bit?

Grimrik :

I think it's impossible to tell someone how to make good Dungeon Synth, but bad Dungeon Synth should be a lot easier to explain. I talked a lot about this before in the Arach interviews. So, sorry that I indicate at those at this point! See also some questions below for additional thoughts on that.

Spooky Griff :

I believe you've mentioned your dismay concerning the lack of attention to detail on cover art, especially on many modern Dungeon Synth releases. Given that Dungeon Synth in particular is supposed to take the listener on a type of journey, would you say that cover art is an important part of that?

Grimrik :

Yes, cover art is really important to me! Imagine: you see so many releases nowadays. The cover is the first thing that catches your interest, if done well. Additionally, when you are already listening, maybe at home in quietness, sitting down and holding the CD or cassette in your hand and look at the cover / layout while listening - it helps you really to dive deep into the world the artist has created for you to explore!

Spooky Griff :

Do you feel the digital platform has enabled the Dungeon Synth revival to grow to the extent it has?

Grimrik :

Yes, at least in quantity. Those things like bandcamp, blogs, facebook and vk.com also helped to build up a real scene. This whole digital thing has strong pros and cons. Of course it is very nice and easy for everyone to release his own stuff to the masses without being bound to a label's choice. But exactly this point is the very bad downside as well. Literally everyone can release literally everything. If you are working completely on your own there is nobody who could say, if needed, "you should work on this track a little longer, redo the (boring) arrangement, there are some frequencies that hurt my ears, I've heard this melody a thousand times before, you do not use enough reverb, this sounds like done by a small kid on a 30 \$ keyboard..." and so on and so on - I could continue this list for a while. So, there is no "quality control" and masses of low-level releases flood the market. This has at least 2 negative effects which should be taken very serious. If "new" people discover the genre and may be at first really interested, they probably discover something bad first, as these are the most releases. They can be really shocked by the lack of seriousness that can be found in some DS productions. This usually makes them turn away immediately and maybe even laugh about the genre - they will never discover the precious albums that are released within the scene as well! The 2nd negative effect is the impact on the scene itself. People get more and more used to low quality releases. They'll accept it as "normal" or even think THIS is what makes it DS!

Spooky Griff :

Using Black Metal as the obvious example, it is broken down into "First Wave", "Second Wave," etc. With that in mind, how would you break down the 'waves' of Dungeon Synth and what would you number the current digital wave which really seems to be kicking off?

Grimrik :

In my opinion, which is perhaps not representative because I am an old-schooler coming from the 90s and re-discovered this music some years ago, there are three waves until now. The first wave is the one that was started by the early pioneers in the 90s. Mortuis, Wongraven, Varg Vikernes with his Synth tracks, Pazuzu, Summoning (they added DS to Black Metal somehow) some others like Depressive Silence - and If I modestly may - I'll list myself here, too, with the "Nazgül - Ash nazg durbatulük..." demo that I released 1996 (on tape).

The third wave was probably started just a few years ago with releases coming to the market that emerged different from the usual, by then and still mostly contemporary, DS and the bandmembers/project leaders show a different approach. Here, (underground) record labels are again involved in the game. In my opinion this third wave means a rise in quality and NOT only quantity anymore. A good album should again stand for itself maybe for a whole year, no need to release semi-quality releases every three months. This wave is still happening and many people seem to get a new sense for quality again. The development of the 2nd wave also has put a lot of pressure on artists besides making it easier. Let me explain. Everybody seems to be in a rush. All people want something new continuously, always hungry for more. The artist has to be strong and ignore that. He has to be able to stand up and say: "No, I won't publish albums three times a year. I will sit down and make ONE album that you can listen to again and again and the listener will often discover something new about it as he digs deeper!"

Another phenomenon of this third wave is that DS starts to be mentioned in blogs and webzines that are not DS only. Additionally, new DS blogs and webzines arise and with "Masmorra" we now have also a printed(!) magazine for DS! So we now have the chance to be taken serious by doing our art properly. Let's do that! My own personal mission is to encourage people to be part of the third wave and let go of the illusion the 2nd wave generated. Let's focus on: fewer, but quality releases that let the listener hear, see and feel all the work and dedication and thought that was put into the albums. Of course musical talent and spirit is the most important thing - but this is just the one half of the game. "Lord Lovidicus" once said, in his opinion too many people would make up their mind about production too much and it were just the notes that count.

People would not buy a book because of the cover but because of the text inside. I am not sure how that was meant by him. Maybe he meant some people's "fetishism" for old and cassette demo sound. Maybe he meant "too good production" - I don't know. Fact is that he tries to deliver a really good sound with his latest releases - and he is right with doing that! Of course a demo sound has a special charm and so on. But if you listen to LL's album Kyndill... or Murgrind's albums - what's wrong with that newer, "better" sound? Nothing. Referring to LL's comparison with the books, I modify it a little: Of course people read and buy books because of what's written down in them. But my complaint is, that some of the "books" in our genre belong in the bin because you can not even READ the letters (because of bad production)!

Along with repeatedly encouraging people to make up their minds about the things mentioned above, I will take - by request - more and more care of the production of albums created by others. I completely mastered Murgrind's 2nd album and gave the sound that final touch.

This is a creative work, too and very important in "serious" musical genres. Additionally I started also with mixing someone else's album (not to be announced yet), which is also a very important thing to get the right sound. Some artists can do great melodies and create atmospheres, but they just can't mix or master. So, where's the problem in giving this work away? If you want a logo or an artwork for your cover and you can't draw, you would also ask somebody for help (hopefully)!

Spooky Griff :

Classic Dungeon Synth has a large focus on European iconography. Do you feel there are other cultures that would lend themselves well to the genre in interesting ways?

Crimrik :

Of course I have nothing against this idea but it could be a bit difficult, right? The name "dungeon" synth refers to dungeons - castles, middle age atmosphere and fantasy that is also based on (pre) middle age like Tolkien's works and pagan culture also. Cultures like the US American didn't have these middle ages for example. On the other hand, an interesting thought would be some Asian stuff like about Samurai and so on! It really depends, in the end this genre is quite close when it comes to its sources of imagery, I guess. There is much potential in Greek Mythology and Roman Empire stuff, there are lots of possibilities that have not been exhausted so far without having to leave Europe for inspiration.

Spooky Griff :

What are some non Dungeon Synth/Black Metal groups or releases that have influenced your music?

Crimrik :

Just to name a few (in no specific order): Jean-Michel Jarre (albums Oxygene and Equinoxe), Delerium, Deuter (the albums he did when he was with Bhagwan in Poona) Michael Cretu (the first Enigma album and his 80s stuff), Kraftwerk, 90s (underground) Trance Music, 80s electronic music, Synthwave and of course classical music.

Spooky Griff :

Thanks again for your time - we look forward to your next release!

Crimrik :

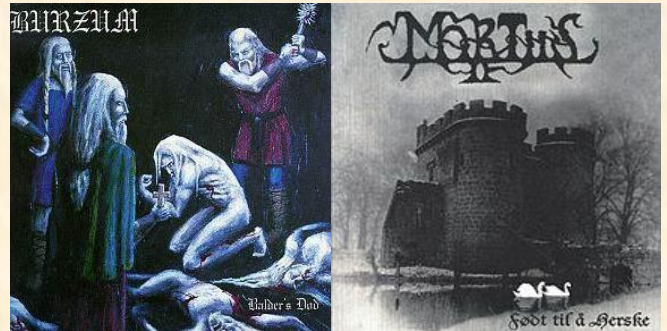
Thanks again for your interest! At the moment I am working heavily on my 2nd album with my Crimrik project, which is scheduled for this year...

Dungeon Synth's Origins And Future

It is unlikely that anyone discovering dungeon synth is a non-metalhead : specifically, a black metalhead. So, to the vast majority of Dungeons of Darkness readers, if I were to ask them what the origins of the genre are, they'd say "Black metal". But to an outsider this may not be so obvious, and even to a dungeon synth and black metal listener, the origins and influences upon the development of dungeon synth may not be so immediately obvious.

Ergo, in this article I'm going to examine briefly the history of dungeon synth, and also the effect that our black metal origins have had on the music we enjoy today, and how our genre might evolve more in the future.

Dungeon synth spawned from black metal. The first dungeon synth musicians were, without exception, black metal musicians. It is only in recent years that people who haven't played black metal start to write and record dungeon synth. The two most famous early dungeon synth albums, which are often said to have spawned the genre, are 'Daudi Baldrs' (1997) by Burzum, and 'Født til å herske' (1993) by Mortiis - the album art for both of which are shown here. They were highly repetitive and ambient works done on synthesizers. Although there were other genres and styles bearing some degree of similarity to this kind of material (ie, some Dark Ambient music and elements of Early Music), nothing else before had such an atmosphere and 'synth' tone to it as these, and it is often considered that these artists helped spawn the dungeon synth genre.



From these were spawned a range of '90's era' dungeon synth bands, which all shared certain sound features in common. A large influence in this was the fact that most people couldn't afford home studios, and so at the time these people had to go to studios to record their music (and these studios were often ones which recorded black metal artists also, since they would already be familiar with dungeon-synth-esque ambient tracks which sometimes feature as intro and outro tracks on black metal album). As a result they tended to be relatively low-fi, and recorded analogue - especially on some recordings of Dolch and Emgjev one can notice that the microphone appears to be almost overdriven at times. There is also a marked preference for Casio keyboards (perhaps because these were more available at the time than other brands) and the sounds they produced. Production on these records (most commonly spread by cassette, as will be discussed later) often featured heavy reverb, assisting in the great emphasis placed by dungeon synth musicians of that time upon ambience, and on some recordings making the music sound as if from an old film. Notably, the musicians of the time tended to be more creative and less repetitive in their music than many current dungeon synth musicians : while some may not consider their sound particularly creative anymore, it is important to realize that at the time there were very few other dungeon synth musicians around and few people doing music like it, so for the time these were highly original and very creative works. Thematically, dungeon synth works of the time tended to focus either on mythology, dark Medieval fantasy, the occult, or simply emulated the more Medieval aspects of black metal iconography and subculture.

The decade of the 1990's is regarded by most dungeon synth musicians and fans as a sort of 'golden age' for dungeon synth, and if critics say that a new release has 'that 90's feel' it is almost always a significant compliment. The music of that time is frequently held up as a standard to which all current and future dungeon synth musicians should inspire, although in my opinion such a view is rather dangerous, as it is likely to lead to complacency and inbreeding within the genre, which would soon render it boring and dead.

Since the 1990's dungeon synth has changed significantly. One of the main ways is that it has become more varied - there are now quite a few different styles of dungeon synth, some which is more complicated and veers closer to classical music (such as the work of Lord Lovidicus) and some which is more minimalist and akin to black metal (such as Brungnir). I attribute this primarily to three factors - the wider availability of MIDI keyboards and home-recording equipment meaning that music production has become democratized and it is much easier for your 'average Joe' to buy a keyboard and start writing dungeon

synth music, the influence of the internet allowing dungeon synth to spread to a wider audience and thereby inspiring musicians with influences broader than just black metal, and also simple natural change that will happen in any genre of music.

The greater variety has not only been in levels of skill but in tone as well - rather than everyone favouring a low-fi, echoey sound as they largely did in 90's dungeon synth, in the present day this varies from artist to artist. Some try to recreate the sounds of the old days, while others explore high-quality production and even the use of real instruments. Moreover, the thematic focus of dungeon synth has broadened significantly, and (partly due to the growth of the internet allowing for a dungeon synth community to exist independent of black metal circles, a topic which will be discussed in the next issue of Dungeons of Darkness and a little more later on in this article) almost developed a theme of its own. Dungeon synth has always been focused on the Medieval time as a genre, but since the 90's that focus has increased, and dungeon synth musicians nowadays often base their work around Medieval and high-fantasy Tolkienesque themes (another influence of black metal subculture, as will be discussed below).

Now that we have examined (in a very reduced and woefully incomplete form) the history of dungeon synth up to the present day it is worth pointing out here the precise ways in which black metal has influenced both the dungeon synth music and subculture/community :

*The fact that most dungeon synth musicians used to play black metal can be seen - especially in modern dungeon synth - in the prevalence of accidentals. When playing with a heavily distorted guitar, there is relatively little onus for a musician - especially when playing solos - to remain in key, and so accidentals are very frequent in black metal. These same musicians when they come to a keyboard and begin to write dungeon synth often do not and have not learned music theory beforehand (one of the things I'm hoping to remedy with the different releases of Dungeons of Darkness) and so they frequently use accidentals and chromaticism in their composition (which, is not necessarily bad).

*Much of the song structure and song composition style from black metal served as the model for dungeon synth music - one might argue that this is what distinguishes it from the similar genre of dark ambient. Dungeon synth songs are through-composed more often than in many other similar genres (a quality found in black metal, especially that of Burzum), and often highly repetitive in both melody and structure (ie, riffs are often echoed, and the ABABAB structure is highly common in dungeon synth as in black metal).

*The modal tonality of dungeon synth derives mainly from black metal playing styles, especially the predominance of minor keys, 4/4 time signatures, and the frequency of the flattened seventh.

*Vocals, when they are performed in dungeon synth, are almost always done in a sort of black metal growl.

*Many dungeon synth artists today favour low-fi production sounds as found in black metal.

*Black metal iconography (such as the black & white photographs in spikey armour) remain popular in dungeon synth.

*The concept of the one-man-band in black metal (inspired by bands such as Bathory and Burzum) may well have facilitated or even created the dungeon synth movement, since almost all music in dungeon synth is produced by one-man-bands. This has, ironically, had the effect of causing dungeon synth to be more of a 'bedroom culture' than the second wave of black metal was, thereby making it simultaneously less similar and more similar to black metal. Indeed, the 'DIY' aspects of dungeon synth culture generally are most definitely drawn from black metal subculture.

*Within the dungeon synth community, the cassette as a medium for transmitting music remains popular even during the digital age of the internet. This is often done through underground deals, trade-taping and word-of-mouth (or, more likely 'word-of-email/letter'), with a great emphasis on dungeon synth being an underground genre of music accessible only to a privileged few. Personally I feel that, unlike black metal (although I think even that genre would never become too 'popular' as some of its adherents fear) dungeon synth stands almost no risk of becoming a popular or widespread genre of music, unless there were to be a serious change in the musical cultures of many different countries. I say this mainly because dungeon synth is very inaccessible music to most and definitely an acquired taste, with appeal primarily (or only) to fantasy nerds and Medievalists.

*Dungeons of Darkness was something I was inspired to do after discovering and reading some of the underground black metal magazines (Kill Yourself!!!!!! And A 1000 Years were the main ones I read), and while this online zine in particular bears relatively little resemblance to those early fanzines, with the development of the Masmorra print zine (which looks much more similar in colour scheme and layout to those old prints) and Barbarian Skull webzine, you could argue that the dungeon synth community is starting to develop a tradition of magazine-writing now that we've gotten to a suitable size.

The previous list is by no means an exhaustive summary of the influence of black metal on dungeon synth, but it covers a lot of the main points. Of course, the list must be enormous by nature because dungeon synth is essentially black metal's baby.

But now that we've considered the past and present of the genre, the question remains - what will the future of dungeon synth be like?

Some people in the dungeon synth community are optimistic that our numbers will swell in coming years. While I do agree with this to some extent, I doubt that it will reach to a much larger extent than it is currently. I think it's fair to estimate that the number of dungeon synth fans in the world probably won't ever go above ten thousand. I wonder if our popularity has peaked even now.

There may well be pretty drastic changes in sound. I think dungeon synth in the 90's was pretty much fledgeling - it was growing in numbers and just coming into being. It is us, now, who are stewards of the grown child that was once black metal's baby. I like to think of this using the terminology of Antony Giddens, who argued that we in present day British society are in a juggernaut train hurtling onwards at full speed - we can't stop the process of social change, but we can choose its direction and either choose to dive into postmodernity or something else. Likewise, I think that at the moment we can change dungeon synth much more than musicians could in decades past, and we could have the most influence over how it will develop in the future.

My personal hope and aim is that dungeon synth will both be democratized and at the same time refined slightly. Through the 'Recording At Home' articles across the different issues of Dungeons of Darkness, I have attempted to give advice to people which will help them to not only physically be able to record dungeon synth music for themselves, but also to understand the music theory that underpins it and use it to inform their songwriting in a better way.

If there was any one particular 'direction' that I'd like the dungeon synth community to turn in, it would be that. My dream is for a dungeon synth community in the future that can read sheet music and understand music theory. A future where dungeon synth musicians publish sheet music booklets outlining their arrangements, along with their albums, so that other musicians may cover their songs the more easily and learn them and teach them to others. A future where songwriting in dungeon synth becomes more complex and accidentals and chromaticism are used due to artistic expression instead of amateur ignorance. And, also, a future where anyone who feels that creative spark in them and wants to contribute to the community can set up their own home studio and start writing their music - no matter how 'poor quality' these may be at first - and know that there are space within the dungeon synth community (like this magazine) where their work will be celebrated and circulated.

But of course, I can't predict the future. Changes in music more broadly will also be quite important - the development of new keyboards, new capabilities for MIDI, new music editing softwares, will open the door for all sorts of new avenues in dungeon synth which I can't possibly begin to anticipate now.

One big change I think is quite likely to happen is the inclusion of non-European cultural influences within dungeon synth. By this I mean that we will see dungeon synth bands arise which celebrate the past of non-European cultures, non-European mythologies, etc. And potentially non-European musical influences might weave their way into the music also - we may see the rise of polyrhythms from African dungeon synth musicians, or the use of the pentatonic scale from Oriental musicians. With dungeon synth growing and expanding and becoming a truly global community this is only natural - and this has already started to happen - especially since the dungeon synth community exists almost entirely on the world wide web, where people from all corners of the world may participate. And I, for one, welcome this change!

I also envision that record labels might become slightly more important in dungeon synth, as the scene becomes saturated with more musicians and they increasingly seek a means of promotion and distribution better than they can give themselves.

But those are just some of my opinions. Think about them, disagree if you find them illogical, and make up your own minds. What do you think the future of dungeon synth will be like?

-Levi Talvi

Interview with Medbelan

Levi :

Tell us a little about yourself and your musical background.

Matteo :

Greetings! I'm Matteo, mastermind of Medbelan, hailing from northern Italy. I grew up listening to extreme metal, mostly black and death, and playing bass in several local bands. I founded Medbelan at the beginning of 2015 to make music which better reflected my views and beliefs, after terminating my former industrial/drone/ambient project, KRIS Industries, which I ran from 2006 to 2014. I'm largely self-taught.

Levi :

What does the name Medbelan mean?

Matteo :

Medbelan is the ancient Celtic name for the town of Milan, in northern Italy, near which I live. According to legend, it was founded around 600 b.C. by the legendary Gaulish chieftain Bellovesus, who led his people through the Alps as commanded by the Gods in a journey to find prosperous lands where to found a new settlement. I chose this name because it speaks of the connection with my land and its roots I want to convey through my music, and also because it symbolically represents the beginning of a new, fruitful quest.

Levi :

What bands have influenced Medbelan's sound?

Matteo :

This is a tough question, as I listen to lots and lots of different music and bits of everything make their way into my sound. My biggest influences undoubtedly are classic dungeon synth and dark ambient acts such as Morcuis (era I), Wongraven, Burzum (blidskjalf mainly), Ildjarn (hardangervidda), but also contemporary DS artists like Murgrind and soundtrack composers such as Basil Poledouris, Howard Shore and Jeremy Soule. Among the "unrelated" influences that can be traced in my music, I'd cite Celtic folk and the layered dreamlike atmospheres of bands like Slowdive and Cocteau Twins.

Levi :

What themes and topics inspire you to write?

Matteo :

I mostly write to express my spiritual inner world and the deep connection I feel with my homeland, its nature, history, folklore and Celtic (Gaulic) heritage. My fascination with the anti-modern values of an idealized past and my Tolkien worship also play a large role. When I write, however, I always feel like I'm painting sceneries, be them real or fantastic ones, rather than telling stories or making statements.

Levi :

How do you write your songs?

Matteo :

I usually start from a single melodic line, I write it down or record it. Then I can spend days or weeks working and reworking that line in my mind with different sounds, arrangements and atmospheres. When I have a clearer picture of the overall feel I want to achieve, I record a song sketch as a starting point and proceed experimenting with different melodies, layers and structures until I can find the right combination of elements. During the process I greatly value constructive criticism and advice from fellow musicians. In this respect, I found a mentor in Grimrik of Arach and Devilforst Records; we got in touch shortly after I released my first album and since then he's been constantly supervising and helping me develop as a composer and producer.

Levi :

How do you record your songs?

Matteo :

I record all my music on a very old laptop with Propellerhead Reason 3, playing all parts on a single-octave midi keyboard, then I do the mixing and mastering in Audacity. This has been unchanged for several years, as I focus more on improving my skills and pushing the limits of what I have available rather than getting better equipment.

Levi :

Are you currently signed to a record label, and if so how has it benefited you?

Matteo :

I am currently unsigned. I like the concept of doing-it-yourself at all stages, self-producing, releasing and promoting short run CDs or cassettes, but I feel a record label would be greatly helpful in making my music reach much more people. I'm working on that.

Levi :

What is your opinion on money in dungeon synth?

Matteo :

I think a common misconception about money is that it somehow takes the "purity" away from art. This is true, sometimes, in the mainstream. But since nobody is actually likely to be involved into an underground scene like the dungeon synth one for money, I think paying a small fee can be a great means for a fan to acknowledge the value of a work and support the artist's efforts. I'm basically against free download and name-your-price because I feel they are detrimental to the very nature of the underground, focusing on attracting more people instead of the "right" people. The only fans an underground artist would need are people willing to respect and actively support his/her work.

Levi :

Is there an ideal setting in which people should listen to your music?

Matteo :

I don't think the setting matters too much, other than being a quiet, comfortable place in which the listener could let his/her mind drift in visions along with the music. Maybe a dark and candle-lit one.

Levi :

Are there any upcoming releases for Medbelan?

Matteo :

There are quite a lot of things going on. A limited CD-r edition of "The minstrel's fireplace tales" EP will be released in September. A split EP with Russian artist Elador will come later in autumn. I'm also currently working on my second full length album, which will be released next year.

Levi :

Where can the readers of Dungeons of Darkness find your music?

Matteo :

You can find my music at my official Bandcamp page:

<http://medbelan.bandcamp.com>

You can also follow my Facebook page for news and updates:

www.facebook.com/medbelanmusic

Levi :

Any last words?

Matteo :

Thank you for this interview, and a huge thank you to all the people supporting my work! DS fans, support the artists you love and buy physical releases! Blessings.



Review of 'Ruler Of The Forest'



'Ruler of the Forest' is a demo by the dungeon synth band Taur Nu Fuin.

You can download the demo on the official Taur Nu Fuin bandcamp page :

<https://taurnufuin.bandcamp.com/album/ruler-of-the-forest>

The album art and song titles have a nature theme to them, which is reflected in the beauty of the songs.

So, without further ado, let's look at them.

01 - Tasarion

The album starts off with a rather upbeat harp playing a fairly fast-paced and complex melody in a low register. This repeats once before it is joined by a pan flute playing a harmony above it. With many more repetitions of the same riff on the harp, the pan flute is then joined by strings, which soon overpower everything. When the strings come to dominate, the harp gradually falls out - at first it starts the scale runs of the initial riff, then it cuts out.

Rainfall sound-effects enter in on top as the strings drop out and the song returns to the dance between pan flute and harp as in the beginning of the piece. The melody is interesting to listen to, and the harmonies are impressively constructed. The artist uses changing textures to emphasize different melodic elements in the song, to the effect that despite the entire piece being based on a single musical motif, one does not notice this at first.

The song continues as in the beginning, with just the harp and pan flute repeating the same melody over and over again, until the very end when the strings return playing an entirely new harmony on top of that. This doesn't last long however, as all the instruments soon begin to fade out as the piece ends.

02 - A Cold Mountain And Cavern's Secret

This second track is a long dungeon synth journey (over ten minutes!). It starts out with a very ominous piano playing in a low register with tonnes of reverb. It plays very dramatic, heart-thumping music which creates a thrilling atmosphere. Although the mood (with the instrumentation) changes throughout this piece, it always has an overbearing element of suspense and evil.

By changing their melodies, instrumentation and (to an extent) the moods in the piece, the creator of 'A Cold Mountain And Cavern's Secret' manages to create the captivating grasp of a storyteller relating a fantastical tale. It ends on a very dramatic note, with strings playing interesting variations upon an initial melody, and very deep percussion beating gradually alongside it. The end is celestial, with one note held on high and low registers of the strings until the song ends.

03 - In The Beauty Of The Lakes

I'm just going to come out here right now and say that 'In The Beauty Of The Lakes' is the most beautiful dungeon synth piece I have ever heard. And beautiful is, in my opinion, entirely the right word to describe it (although soulful, graceful, emotional, haunting, powerful and memorable all come to mind). Granted, the piece is written in D minor (and, for some reason I'm almost certain to love a piece if it's in D minor), but I truly believe this is a wonderful song.

And, surprisingly enough (considering my praise of more technical composition) this isn't an overly technical piece. It is relatively repetitive, the melodies themselves aren't developed overmuch. Moreover, the piece itself is based on a drone, which does (sort of) repeat throughout the piece. This is the piece I will always hold up as an example of how music doesn't need to be complicated or varied in order to be beautiful and impactful.

In the very beginning, we hear the riff that the entire song is based on. It is played on strings in a very low register, and consists of only six notes (A, Bb, C, A, D, C), the first and fourth ones held for a minim and the second, third, fifth and sixth of those notes being held for a crotchet.

This drone repeats throughout almost all of the piece (and even the sections where it does not play are clearly based upon the drone). After two initial repetitions of the drone it is joined by a melody played on strings in a higher register. It is based on a pedal tone and relatively fast-paced, but the lack of attack on the strings prevents it from being jarring. Then after a few repetitions of that melody the strings play something different - yet still based upon the drone, which plays on underneath them - and is joined by an even higher-pitched strings set creating delicious harmonies. The lack of attack makes this section sound truly celestial and wonderful! Within this section the three-part polyphony and counterpoint is simply amazing!

Then it reverts to the same pedal-tone riff from before. But after a few repetitions, pizzicato strings join in playing a new melody, a harmony upon the pedal-tone riff. Afterwards, breaking into the 'celestial' section once again, a double bass plays the same harmony as the pizzicato strings, adding a sense of grounding to this otherwise rather airy section.

At the end of the piece the double bass plays its harmony unaccompanied (even the drone drops out), save for the sparse beat of a drum. Two repetitions later, the 'pedal-tone' section returns, with the drone and everything. It ends with all the strings holding a chord together. While there was nothing dramatic with the ending, I felt there didn't need to be - I was truly awed by the raw beauty and splendour of this song, and it's one of my favourite dungeon synth songs of all time.

04 - Archernar's Dance

Deep, chudding piano in a low register is contrasted with the upbeat sound of twinned flutes in the beginning of this piece. It is a theme prevalent throughout its entirety - ominous-sounding melodies in the lower registers co-existing with jolly ones in the higher registers. Resulting in a morbid, yet strangely optimistic dance. The frequent use of pizzicato strings in this piece certainly aids in the depiction of a dance.

Two minutes into the piece it becomes more grandiose and majestic, with the strings becoming predominant and playing a slow-paced yet powerful tune. It, as all parts of this song (and almost all the album, really) is harmonized well. The composer uses differing dynamics, tempos and textures (as well as instrumentation) to change the mood of the piece - a mark of skill.

It is on a somewhat grandiose note that the piece end - strong strings and echoing cymbals play a slow dirge into a gradual fade. 'Archernar's Dance' had the same feeling of journey as in the second piece on this demo.

05 - Ruler Of The Forest

Starting out dramatically, with pounding percussion and low-register strings that gradually become louder, 'Ruler Of The Forest' takes the listener on one final journey of the demo. The instrumentation of this piece changes frequently, absolutely and sharply, and the different instruments usually seem to adopt new melodies of their own.

In addition, the mood and atmosphere of the piece varies. It ranges from conveying a dramatic adventurous sensation, to calm and quiet reflection, to mystery and intrigue.

The demo ends on a less dramatic note, however. From a section where a harp is the only melodic instrument (accompanied by a deep bass drum) it progresses in a dirge, quietening in a steady diminuendo until it peters out.

Final Thoughts : 'Ruler Of The Forest' is one of my favourite demos, and it warmed me greatly to the band Taur Nu Fuin. This release managed to impress me despite the fact that I wasn't entirely enamoured with the digital instruments used (although that's an incredibly subjective opinion anyway) with its excellent composition, counterpoint, polyphony and at times just its sheer beauty. I would give this demo five stars out of five and I would highly recommend all the readers of Dungeons of Darkness to follow the link given at the start of this review to listen to the demo yourselves.

-Levi Talvi

Interview with Mental Cage

<p>Levi :</p> <p>Tell us a little about your musical history.</p> <p>How did you get into music, why did you play? Did you play with any other bands in the past?</p>	<p>Well there are a lot of great artists that somehow speak to me: Lycia, Sopor Aeternus, Coldworld, Xaschur, Nortt, Ahab, Fever Ray, Cris etc. There are too much to mention basically everything I listen to inspires me, also nature and people around me have given me some ideas for my art. :)</p>
<p>Rob :</p> <p>Since I remember, I've always loved music. Of course, when I was a little kid I've listened to pop-music and everything that my parents listened. But as I grew older, I've discovered hip-hop and rock music. Then when I've got to high school I've got infected by metal music and so started to practice guttural and extreme vocals. After that it was just a question of time when I'd learn to play drums, guitar and finally form a band. In fact, I've been in a lot of bands before I finally decided to start a one-man project.</p>	<p>Levi :</p> <p>Do you do your music alone? And do you promote/release it alone, or do you do this in association with a label?</p>
<p>To answer your question I've played with a lots of bands like: iAM esper, Xerbittert, Mentalny Kolaps, Asimonde, Deep-pression, Woods of desolace, Taarma, Black Sheep, Nebula VII, Thanatos and many more.</p>	<p>Rob :</p> <p>I do my music all by myself, I record, write lyrics, do the artwork and sometimes release it as a free download. But when I feel like it, I use to contact labels and then release a album physically.</p>
<p>Levi :</p> <p>What was the concept behind Mental Cage? There seems to be a lot of disdain for the modern world in your music and a wish for a return to magic. Am I wrong in that assumption?</p>	<p>Levi :</p> <p>What do you do to get inspired for your music?</p>
<p>Rob :</p> <p>When I decided to create Mental Cage, my intention was to create beautiful music just for pure enjoyment. That was the case with the first album "My gift to You" but when I started making the follow up I kinda ended up creating this anti modern world pieces. At the time I was thinking alot about what is happening all over the world be it war, hunger, technology that is creating millions of zombies around us. What I wanted with this album is to show my opinion on the situation and also offer a way out. And if you ask me I would love people to go back to Love. Everything has become so cold and impersonal, things as family and friends are put aside for money, carriers and meaningless garbage. I don't want people to turn to magic as you say, in fact I'm very much against any kind of magic and the occult in general. As I'm sure some will know I'm a christian.</p>	<p>Rob :</p> <p>Nothing special in particular, I live life and think about what's happening around me. Basically I get inspired everywhere be it at work, at home, while taking a walk or even when I get to bed. There are no fixed techniques I use to get inspired it just happens.</p>
<p>Levi :</p> <p>What bands and artists would you say influenced you in creating your music?</p>	<p>Levi :</p> <p>What are your main interests outside of music?</p> <p>Rob :</p> <p>honestly there's not too much; I like to chill with my family and friends, play some video games, make designs for bands, also review or interview them for my zine. That's basically it.</p> <p>Levi :</p> <p>What recording software/instruments do you use to record for Mental Cage?</p> <p>Do you record in a home studio or elsewhere?</p> <p>Do you ever plan to perform Mental Cage (or any of your other bands) live?</p>

Rob :

To be honest with You I don't really like to talk about the stuff I use for recording. But I say so much I do it all at home and most of the time I use some midi keys, guitars (classical & electric) and a mic. So, it's probably the most basic stuff You can have.

About the playing live, I've thought about it a lot of times and I probably would if I could play the stuff I record in a interesting way and not just standing by the laptop. If I ever play live it will be a powerful show with a full band.

Levi :

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

Rob :

Of course there is, as I've said earlier I want people to open their eyes and finally start changing something. And I also want to spread the Word of God through my music. I know some will probably start spitting now, but it's not a problem for me.

Levi :

Could you tell us a little about the magazine you write, which you mentioned earlier?

Rob :

The name of the zine is "Music of shadows".

I've basically started it by reviewing and interviewing a lot of my friends that make music but very soon it went so far that I've got to work with some legendary bands such as : Evoken, Pantheist & Frost Like Ashes, and also with labels that are now a "huge" name in the "scene" like hypnotic Dirge Recs., Le Crépuscule du Soir productions, Naturmacht Prod., Prophecy Recs. and many more.

Sadly I had to put the zine on hold, because I couldn't handle all the requests alone (over 100mails in a month). But I'm sure I'll revive it in the future.

Levi :

Do you have an ideal fan? And do you think your music is meant to be listened to in a particular setting?

Rob :

An ideal fan? No, I don't like limiting of one self. My music is ment to be enjoyed by everyone and in the way they want; be it alone at home, be it in the forest at night or any way they enjoy it the most. But if I had to choose, I'd say it's best enjoyed alone and in peace, because it's exactly the way I created it.

Levi :

Where can the readers of Dungeons of Darkness find your music?

Rob :

At this time all of my releases are available for free download on my website

<http://mentalcage.weebly.com>

I also have a facebook page and a Youtube account where everybody can take a listen.

Levi :

Any last words?

Rob :

I want to thank You for taking the time to make this happen. I also want to wish You and everyone who reads this all the best possible. Much love and respect.



["It is to be noted that this interview was conducted in 2013, before the release of the first edition of Dungeons of Darkness. It was due to my incompetence that I simply forgot to include it in that release, and assumed that I had. So I apologize profusely to Rob for this error, and I hope that putting it in the third issue will remedy that somewhat." - Levi Talvi]



Deiolforst Records

finest dungeon synth

www.deiolforst.de

Interview with Albazred

Levi :

Tell us a little bit about yourself and your musical background.

Max :

Hey there, my name is Max and I come from Germany, currently still studying.

The musical background that led me to the dungeon synth music I make with Albazred mainly consists of the cold atmosphere in black metal, paired with classical and movie score orchestrations plus a bit of 80's synth music. I think this is a rather common combination, though.

Levi :

Where does the name Albazred come from?

Max :

Abdul Albazred is a fictional character that appears in the Lovecraft universe, he is also referred to as the "Mad Arab". I chose the name because it combined a Lovecraft part with something resembling arabic culture, two things which I am both interested in.

Levi :

Why do you find Lovecraft so inspirational for dungeon synth music?

Max :

While H.P. Lovecraft is not the only author I enjoy, I figured his stories best fit to the music I make and on the other hand I can draw much inspiration from him and his universe.

Also, everyone is doing Tolkien today so I can say I picked only the second most generic topic haha.

Levi :

What are your biggest musical influences?

Max :

Generally speaking this should be metal, especially black and death metal. I also enjoy classical music from time to time.

Levi :

How do you record your music, and what music editing software do you use?

Max :

I decided for Albazred to be a synth-only project without real instruments and vocals. Therefore all my music comes from midi files, as I don't like ready-to-use stuff like loops and samples. Every note stands on its own.

The software I use was rather cheap, it's Magix Samplitude Music Studio 16 and besides midi I also use it for recordings (in other projects) and mixing.

Levi :

How do you write your songs?

Max :

Sometimes I come up with a good melody and build from that, sometimes I start with some base grumbling that represents the ocean or the deep universe, it varies.

But what always helps me is some basic harmony knowledge like you learn it in school, which makes me able to write bigger parts from a scratch without testing or playing it all the time.

Levi :

Are you signed to a record label currently, and if so how do you feel it has helped you?

Max :

Albazred isn't signed to any label and I don't feel there is need for it as all albums are and will be for free download.

Getting a label for physical releases would be nice but it's not important currently.

Levi :

What is your opinion on money in dungeon synth?

Max :

I give my music away for free and I feel like this fits to the dungeon synth spirit. however, I am not mad at people who want some money for their work.

Fun fact: Last time I looked, Albazred's first album had more downloads at an illegal download site than from the official one, although it's for free. But as I don't charge anything I can be fine with that and have no troubles.

Levi :

Do you have any side-projects

Max:

Yes, my post black metal project hjed. I play guitars and bass and also do the vocals, it's a one-man-project.

After an EP in 2013 the first full-length will be released this fall. I am pretty proud of it and hope it will cause some impact.

Levi :

Do you have any upcoming releases for Albazred?

Max:

Not yet, but I am in an inspired mood again, so after the hjed album will be released I can't wait to start writing again for Albazred. If it works like I wish, there will be new stuff in 2016 then.

Levi :

Where can the readers of Dungeons of Darkness find your music?

Max :

You can find the first and yet only album "The Music of Erich Zann" on bandcamp at :

<http://albazred-ambient.bandcamp.com/>

Also, an Albazred track has been featured on the compilation CD of Masmorra, the first printed dungeon synth magazine.

Levi :

Any last words?

Max:

Thanks to you for this interview and thanks to the readers of Dungeons of Darkness! Go get some free Albazred music and keep your eyes open for more next year!

The logo for the band Albazred, featuring the name in a stylized, gothic-style font with a horizontal line above the letters 'h' and 'z'. The text is white on a black rectangular background.

The Promos

As you might have noticed, throughout the zine there have been flyers for a few different things. These are dungeon synth related projects (and record labels) which I would like to promote in Dungeons of Darkness.

If you have a project (such as another zine or a label) that you would like to be promoted here, all you need to do is contact me through the information which will be provided on the next page, and your project will be included in the fourth issue of Dungeons of Darkness - there's no other requirements, and anything which isn't egregious will be promoted.

I should point out however, that I don't include flyers for upcoming albums unless I have either reviewed the album or interviewed the artist themselves in the same edition of the zine. In those instances I put the flyer in front of the album being reviewed or artist being interviewed, since it adds a little something to that.

For the promos I decided to just allow the project creators to make their own flyers speaking for themselves (especially since they know more about these things than I will), so here I will just offer a brief description of what they are, to clarify.

So, in order, Dungeons of Darkness wishes to support :

* Barbarian Skull Webzine

This is a webzine which does album reviews and band interviews of dungeon synth, dark ambient and some metal bands too. It's done by MacTaidh, the founder of the dungeon synth band Brungnir, and you should definitely check it out (the link is provided on the picture).

* Masmorra Dungeon Synth Magazine

I'm delighted to be promoting the first in-print (as in, physical print) dungeon synth magazine in the world! Founded by the creator of the dungeon synth band Iami, the magazine does band interviews, album interviews, posters and much more! It's a brilliant project which you should all give your support.

Although this promo is coming a little too late (since the first edition was so good it sold out rapidly), you can still like the Masmorra Dungeon Synth Facebook page and contact the creator so that when the second issue comes out you can be sure to know about it and get one before they're all gone.

(And they'll go quite fast - the editor limits the number of prints made, so Masmorra zines are really quite rare collector items)

Dungeons of Darkness would also like to thank Masmorra Dungeon Synth Magazine for helping to grow the scene! You have an eternal friend in us.

* Eisreich (by Grimrik)

This is the upcoming album by Grimrik. It's fairly self-explanatory and tells you where you can buy it, and his upcoming album 'Die Mauern der Nacht'. It precedes the awesome interview done by Spooky Griff McLain.

* Deivforst Records

This is a well-respected dungeon synth record label, with artists such as Murgrind, Grimrik and Arath signed to it. You can contact them following the information on the flyer itself if you are interested in working with/for them or supporting them. They produce cassettes, CD's, and recently they conducted a really fun cover contest which helped bring artists together and was a great means to grow the dungeon synth community.

-Levi Talvi

Credits And Contacts

After a long time (and a longer-than-usual read) we've reached the end of another issue of Dungeons of Darkness! I'm truly grateful to everyone who has supported the magazine, and here is where I show that :

*Dungeons of Darkness thanks Spooky Griff McLain for creating the awesome cover, providing the skulls and other small art pieces which fill in the empty spaces, and for conducting the brilliant interview with Grimrik.

*Dungeons of Darkness thanks Masmorra Dungeon Synth Zine for promoting us and giving us their flyer. We hope to return the favour.

*Dungeons of Darkness thanks Barbarian Skull webzine for their flyer.

*Dungeons of Darkness thanks Deivlforst Records for their flyer.

*Dungeons of Darkness thanks all the artists who we interviewed for their contributions to the zine.

And, of course, Dungeons of Darkness expands a huge 'thank you' to all our readers, whether new or returning - you keep this magazine and the dungeon synth community alive and you're what makes this worth doing. Thank you so much for your support!

And now a quick disclaimer before I reveal our contact details.

DISCLAIMER : DUNGEONS OF DARKNESS DOES NOT OWN ANY OF THE IMAGES USED IN THIS PUBLICATION. WHERE POSSIBLE WE HAVE TRIED TO CONTACT THE OWNERS AND OBTAIN PERMISSION. IF YOUR IMAGES HAVE BEEN INCLUDED WITHOUT PERMISSION AND YOU WISH FOR THEM TO BE REMOVED, PLEASE CONTACT US AT THE INFORMATION BELOW AND IT WILL BE TAKEN DOWN.

Who is this weird person writing about themselves in the royal first person plural, and how can I contact them?

That would be me, Levi Talvi, the editor and creator of Dungeons of Darkness. If you wish to contact me about being featured in the next issue, there are now a multitude of ways you can get in touch!

I strongly encourage all of you to like the official Dungeons of Darkness Facebook page, through which you can contact us directly ;

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

You may also like the Dungeon Synth Facebook page (which I manage), where new dungeon synth releases are posted as well as frequent updates about Dungeons of Darkness ;

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

Alternatively, you may email me at ;

XXXXXXXXX@hotmail.com

Or you may use my mobile number ;

07XXXXXXXXX

And, if you wish to send me physical correspondence, or just presents because I'm so awesome, you may send them to the following address ;

XXXXXX London, England

And now, I hand over to you, the reader. Spread this magazine to your friends, share it with family, and like our Facebook page. I thank you once again for your invaluable support of the first dungeon synth magazine in the world!

-Levi Talvi

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In cruce compſſa teneo cū aſpide ſpatay .
Ex alia ſz pre grauo cū aſpide pectus .



