

“I’VE NEVER LIED TO YOU, I’VE ALWAYS BEEN COOL...”

Arjen Lucassen Gets Elected

Much more interesting and, at three-and-a-half minutes, considerably shorter than the seemingly unending Obama/Clinton saga, the Lucassen/Sammet ‘election furore’ presented an opportunity to catch up with Arjen Lucassen back in May. Before getting the low-down on ‘Elected’, however, I was keen to see how the current Ayreon album ‘01011001’ was doing, given that it had been out, I reckoned, for about six months or so.

“Is it six months already?” Arjen pauses. “I think it was only released in January,” he says tactfully. “But it’s going well. Above expectations, in fact; actually, for the first time I entered the charts in thirteen countries, and that’s cool, you know, because all bands always say, ‘It did great; we’re really big in Japan,’” he laughs. “But this time I can say it’s a fact, you know; I entered the charts in thirteen countries - in Holland even at No.2, Germany at No.18; so sales are going great, and the reviews have all been basically positive.”

I was going to chip in and suggest that at his height, he’s big anywhere, but instead wondered why he thought this

album had done so well chart-wise.

“I think mainly because ‘The Human Equation’ did so well,” he replies. “Maybe because so many people liked ‘The Human Equation’, I think it opened a whole new market. And so I think a lot of people who liked that album bought ‘01...’ without having even heard it. So I think that’s why it entered so many charts. And it’s a build-up too, you know, a slow build-up; this is the seventh album, the fans have become very loyal and I hope that by now they know that I deliver quality, that they can buy the album unheard, and so it sold very fast; there was a lot of people pre-ordering it and that’s why it entered the charts in so many countries.

“Of course,” he adds, “also it’s a known fact that all CD sales are going down and so we all have to sell less CDs to get into the charts - that goes for all bands - but I think I just have very loyal fans. But you know in the end, I’ll only know if the album is well received when I do the next one. ‘The Human Equation’ did well so ‘01...’ did well, but if people don’t like ‘01...’ they won’t buy the next one. So that’s when you feel it; even if you make a better album, you know, that’s when you feel it.”



I point out that it’s a bit early to be talking about a new album already, to which he deadpans, “Uh, I’ve already started working on it.” This is a guy who doesn’t take holidays! “No,” he laughs. “Holidays are for other people! That’s just the way it is. I’m happiest when I’m in the studio creating new stuff. Usually I gather a lot of new ideas over the course of half a year and then I start picking out the best bits and start working on them but, this time, at the first opportunity I just went into the studio and started working again. And that seems to have worked really great because it’s inspired me to come up with new stuff... So, I’m pretty inspired at the moment!”

OK, moving on, ‘Elected’, a collaboration between Arjen and Tobias Sammet of Edguy and Avantasia fame, was released earlier in the year. A four-tracker kicking off with a heavy take on the Alice Cooper classic, the EP came about because of perceived rivalries between the two artists. “When I was doing the interviews in December there were so many people asking me about the Avantasia album ‘The Scarecrow’ because it’s also a rock opera and was released on exactly **1**

the same date as my '01...album," recalls Arjen. "And also we had two of the same singers on the album. So a lot of people were asking me about it, and I was like, 'I don't know. I haven't heard it.' Then I heard that Tobias had Alice Cooper on there," he laughs, "and I was like 'Damn!' because all my life I've been trying to get Alice Cooper on my albums, and he just went and did it! He's just a young guy; he hasn't got that history with Alice like I have" - another laugh - "since I was fifteen I've been listening to his stuff! I was so angry at the time

I just said it and afterwards I was sorry for it,' and I was like, 'Hey man, no problem'. So we started mailing each other. And it was funny, you know; it was really funny mailing each other and insulting each other.

"Then at one point he started getting really angry at the press, because the press were making us rivals, you know; there were articles like 'Clash Of The Titans', setting us up towards each other. I kind of liked it actually: I was like, 'Cool!' It reminded me of the Oasis/Blur thing - remember that? But To-

"When we did it, it was a joke really; it was a matter of, 'Let's do something together,' you know? We decided to do a cover, we consciously decided not to do anything new or try to do something 'incredible' or 'different'; it was just a bonus track for the new single. But the pitfall of doing a cover like 'Elected', is how can you make it better than the original. You can make it sound" - he emphasises the word - "better than the original, at least you can do that, but you can't make it better than the original and you can't really make it very different. So the version is pretty true to the original, but it does sound a lot bigger and a lot heavier, and we changed to lyrics to include a little bit of joking at the end... But does it add anything to the original? To be honest, I doubt that," he laughs. "It's heavier, yes; that was intentional. My intention was to make it so over the top that it would be a love-it-or-hate-it version. But I love the original so much, and it's been a part of my history... I mean, it was just a bonus track, and then the record company heard it and other people heard it and they were all like, 'Oh, this is fantastic! This is great! This should be the single. And I was like, 'Yeah, but it's not even on the album; how can it be the single? Isn't that weird?' And they just said, 'No, we'll make it an EP and put a couple of other songs on there that aren't on the album. Originally, you see, the single was going to be 'Ride The Comet' and the other three tracks were going to be bonus tracks. But then at the last moment we switched it around because SPV really liked the version of 'Elected'."

The EP is rounded out with a couple of acoustic re-workings of Ayreon songs, 'E=mc2' and 'Day Six: Childhood'. **2**

The Universal Agreonaut
Vol 2084, No 01011001 THE ELECTRIC CASTLE, MONDAY, APRIL 1, 2008

AYREON VS. AVANTASIA

Ayreon releases "Elected" EP

On January 25, 2008 the rock operas of Arjen Lucassen and Tobias Sammet, respectively Ayreon's 01011001 and Avantasia's The Scarecrow, were released simultaneously. The music press, always eager for a story, called this event the 'Clash of the Titans', gleefully portraying the two musicians

When asked about the so-called rivalry, Arjen explains: "I'd not yet even heard Tobias's album, but when I found out he'd managed to get my all-time favourite artist Alice Cooper to guest on The Scarecrow, I totally freaked out and sent a hate-mail to Tobias's MySpace. Fortunately, he

and in the stream of email and insults that followed "it turned out that Tobias hated me just as much for having got Bruce Dickinson to guest on an Ayreon album, haha!" Arjen explains. Despite their mutual hatred, the two musicians then hatched a plan to put some fuel on the fire created by the press

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that I even sent a mail to his MySpace - 'Fuck you, asshole. You got Alice Cooper! I hate you!' Of course it was tongue-in-cheek though. And I never heard anything back, so either he never received it, or it was like 'What the fuck is this?' Then about two months later I got a mail from Tobias saying, 'Hey, we get to talk about each other all the time, why not get acquainted?' And also he appeared to have said something nasty about me; he said something like my music was 'pseudo-intellectual' and he said, 'I don't mean that shit, you know.

bias was quite angry, and said, 'Let's do something together; that will shut them all up!'

"At that time we had the idea, you know, wouldn't it be cool to do an Alice Cooper song, because that's the reason I mailed him in the first place. We decided that 'Elected' would be quite cool because then it's us fighting -you know, 'Elect me!' 'No, elect me!' So I recorded the song and sent it to him and he liked the idea, so he put his vocals and that's how it came about.



“Well, we did a lot of radio stuff with Marjan Welman. Marjan sang the original version of ‘E=mc2’ on the album and was basically a singer in an Ayreon cover band. I really liked what she did so to give her a chance in the music business I had her sing on ‘01...’ - which helped, by the way, because she’s a member of Autumn now, which is cool because she’s a big talent. Anyway, I also did a lot of acoustic shows with her. We did a lot of record shops, you know, just turning up and doing a couple of songs, and we did a lot of live radio. One of those radio shows - Brussels - sounded really cool and we asked them if we could use it and put it on the single. So that’s ‘E=mc2’. At these shows we also did ‘Day Six’ off ‘The Human Equation’ and we also had a radio version of that but I didn’t want to put two versions from the same source on the EP.” Enter After Forever’s keyboard wizard Joost van den Broek. “So I asked Joost to do a cool piano part for this song to make it a bit different - it is very different from the original - and I love the way Marjan sings it. It gives it a completely different feel, being sung by a woman, as the original version had three male singers - Devon Graves, James Labrie and Mikael Ak-erfeldt - on it. You know, it’s funny that when I cover someone else’s songs they sound exactly the same, but when I do

my own, they come out completely differently! But anyway, we transposed it from E minor to A minor for a female voice, and Marjam changed the lyrics to fit just one singer. I really like the way this version of the song sounds because it’s just the basics, just the piano, bass and voice. It just shows how a song sounds when you strip it down, especially with my music. I see myself more as a producer really; my songs are very elaborate, very bombastic and there are so many layers and instruments and vocalists... So it’s very satisfying to me to see the song is still very enjoyable if you strip it down to the basics.”