

NEVERLAND

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“ALL CHILDREN, EXCEPT ONE, GROW UP”

Vocalists Iris Mavraki and Oganalp Canatan of Dreamtone & Iris Mavraki's *Neverland* discuss 'Reversing Time'

One of the year's most interesting albums so far is 'Reversing Time' by Neverland, a collaboration between Turkish power metallers Dreamtone and Greek vocalist Iris Mavraki. In many ways an odd combination, on CD it works beautifully, and 'Reversing Time' is a very good album indeed. But before bringing things up to date, I was keen to hear a bit about pre-Neverland days from both points of view.

"Well," starts Iris, "my story is a bit long. I am Greek, from the island of Rhodes, my father Greek and my mother Austrian, and I was born in the middle of Africa in the Belgian Congo. At the age of two, I started travelling, and all these things influenced my view about life in general and also as an artist. I had a classical education but soon was attracted by the powerful songs of Joan Baez, Bob Dylan, Melanie, Pink Floyd, and later our great composer Mikis Theodorakis and others. I spent many years performing concerts, especially against racism and war, for environmental projects, etc. Recently

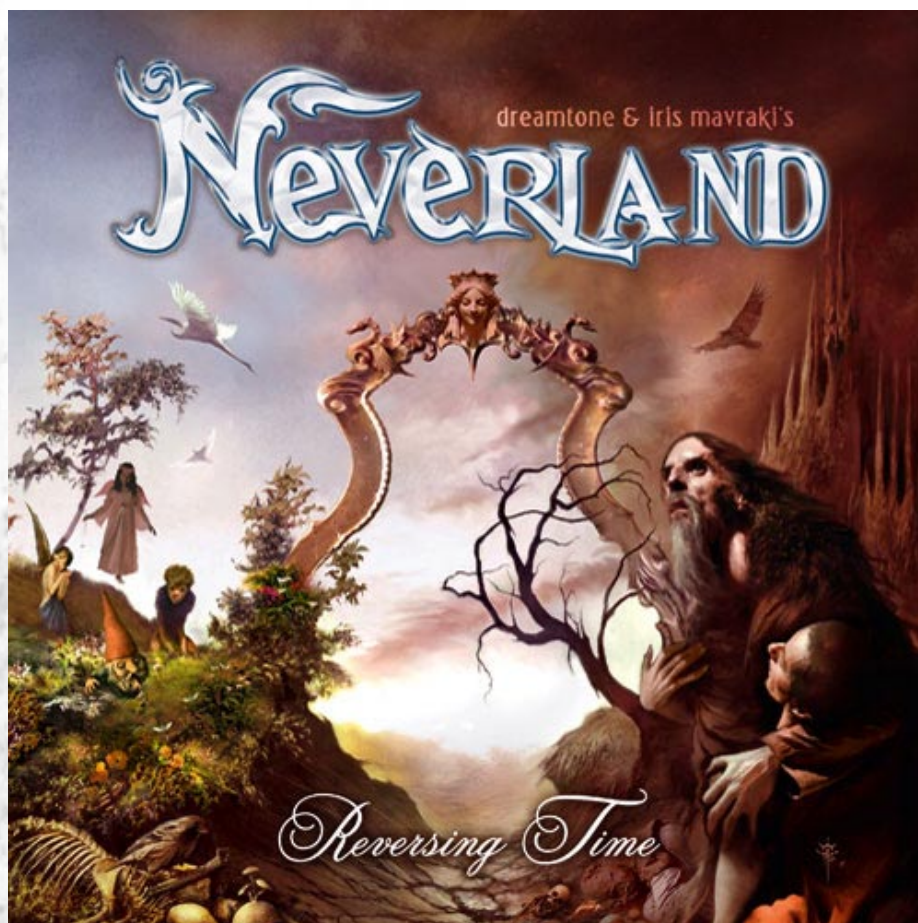
I've sung as a soloist with many important State and University Symphony Orchestras in Turkey, giving concerts in both countries in my efforts to create a cultural bridge with our neighbour Turkey." "Meanwhile," says Oganalp, "Dreamtone started back in 2001, when me and lead guitarist Onur Ozkoc decided to form a new band after our short journey with the band Exotherm was over." Adding Burak Kahraman (rhythm guitars), Can Dedekarginoglu (bass) and



drummer Emre Can Sevdim, Dreamtone was formed. "Up to now, we have recorded two singles, one demo album and one full length album, toured with Blind Guardian in 2007 (and opened for them in 2006), opened for Dream Theater and toured or shared the stage with bands like Anathema and Megadeth - with hopefully more to come in the future!" he laughs.

The catalyst behind the formation of Dreamtone & Iris Mavraki's *Neverland* was Iris's son Orpheus. "Knowing my interest in new bands he gave me a CD of Dreamtone to listen to, and I was impressed, tremendously, as there was something that attracted me, something very melodic and powerful at the same time. So I decided to contact them and then went to Ankara in Turkey to meet them."

"We were promoting our demo album 'Unforeseen Reflections' at the time," continues Oganalp. "I believe it was April or May 2004 when we first started to talk with Orpheus, our manager, who was the chief editor of Metal Temple E-Zine at that time. He introduced us to Iris and together, **1** in time, we slowly built the



idea of Dreamtone and Iris Mavra-ki's Neverland. It was a live band idea at first, only to go on stage together and play some tunes. But then, we decided to turn it into a full time band. And here we are: no objections or fallings-out so far within the last four years!" he laughs.

Neverland was, of course, the home of J.M. Barrie's Peter Pan. "Well, Barrie's Neverland was surely the idea," confirms Oganalp. "The word first came to our minds and we slowly saw that it is not only a nice name for a band, but also tells our story and beliefs more than many of the other names that we considered." "Besides," adds Iris, "Neverland is a place for one's soul to seek refuge, a place where you can remain a child, a hideaway, a brighter corner if you wish. And it's also a place of inspiration and enlightenment for the brain, soul and heart."

"And 'Reversing Time'," continues Oganalp, "is basically about being able to re-experience the events back in time, you know, never getting old, staying the same age as Peter Pan."

That said, there's no actual concept running through the album. "Not directly," Iris confirms, "but there is somehow a connection through the songs, about mankind, war, hate, love, reversing things and reversing time, everlasting tranquillity..."

"Yes, you wouldn't define it as a full concept," says Oganalp, "but there is a story going on behind the scenes. Each song has its own sub-plot which is connected to the general idea of 'Reversing Time'. Would it be the same if we had the chance to reverse time and face again our mistakes, the paths we chose, and so on; for example, a song like 'To Lose the Sun' works on the idea of reversing time and preventing the death of a father's son."

As mentioned above, 'Reversing Time' is a great album with really strong songs and a broad range of material, all beautifully per-

formed. "Thanks a lot!" says Oganalp. "We are happy about with how well it turned out in the end, and what pleased us more is that almost 90% of the media shares our thoughts on it!"

I wondered how easily the recording sessions went. "The hardest parts were the ones with the orchestra," recalls Oganalp, "and with Hansi's recordings; other than that we didn't have many problems. Hansi's recordings had to be cancelled several times due to time scheduling problems and then some other stuff that we didn't have any control over - a storm that destroyed the studio's rooftop, for example! But he tried so hard to record his parts and, thank God, he completed them and turned in a brilliant performance! The orchestral recordings were problematic as well, because we encountered some serious technical setbacks, and problems with pre-recorded tracks because as we worked at several different studios we had technological synchronisation problems. But it turned out fine in the end."

"I have worked with orchestras before, as I mentioned," says Iris, "but for Dreamtone it was their first time. It is a completely different feeling and it is a tremendous experience, believe me."

"Working with an orchestra is not the challenge," continues Oganalp. "It's the problems and obstacles you face that are the real challenge. At first, we had a 'dialogue' problem with the musicians as metal music and classical music do not approach compositions with the exact same feeling. However, after an initial 'meet and greet' session we slowly started to understand each other. And in the end, all of us were like little kids, jumping and screaming and reduced to tears when the orchestra was playing our tunes. Can you believe it? An entire orchestra plays your tunes and you are only in your early Twenties. It was definitely a brilliant feeling for us Dreamtone guys!"

Skipping back a second, the Hansi referred to earlier is, of course,

Blind Guardian's Hansi Kürsch, who along with Evergrey's Tom Englund and Mike Baker and Gary Wehrkamp from Shadow Gallery, make a guest appearance on the album. "Hansi was in Athens on tour," recalls Iris, "and my son Orpheus knows him quite well. So one day we asked him if he would be our guest and he accepted immediately."

"Well, after Hansi said OK to our proposition, we decided to extend the offer to some of our favourite artists. Blind Guardian, Shadow Gallery and Evergrey are my top three favourite bands and when they all - Gary, Mike, Tom and Hansi - agreed to be guests, I was so excited I remember jumping up and down for about ten minutes until I became dead tired!" laughs Oganalp.

Given the Greek/Turkish background of the musicians, it's no surprise that their indigenous influences appear in the music from time to time. "It's not something we stressed on purpose," says Iris, anticipating the question. "It comes naturally; as you know both Dreamtone and I come from countries where such ethnic influences are part of our culture."

"This is the music that's part of our daily lives as well as a tradition of our culture," adds Oganalp. "And it is also in our interest to listen to ethnic stuff from all around the world. Aside from the bands that we really love, we get more excited when we hear ethnic stuff rather than a 'new' metal album that we've already heard a million similar versions of. As musicians, we own our own traditional instruments like a bağlama or a kanun or stuff like that and we love to experiment with them."

Neither country though has a huge metal scene... "What scene!" snorts Oganalp. "Turkey doesn't have much to offer. Perhaps twenty years from now we will have something decent going on but now it's all about some bands trying to do some business, some shops who try to rip off musicians, some promoters who try to do everything for free, some **2**

magazines who are only interested in what their girl/boyfriends' bands are doing at a local pub. A typical non-professional market. When things become professional, in the future, it will be better." He pauses. "We hope!"

"Things are better in Greece," adds Iris. "It's not a very big scene but it exists, and especially in the last years it's growing bigger." Alongside her bandmate, she sounds almost apologetic.

The conversation moves away from the album, and I couldn't help remarking on the traditional enmity between Turkey and Greece over the years, wondering if this had caused any problems at all, and whether they saw Neverland as breaking down any barriers in this respect.

"Yes," Iris responds, "our nations have unfortunately inherited problems and bitterness from the past, but we believe that music is the universal language and carries messages and magic that can unite and unify - as politicians cannot - and as artists we want to bring people closer. It's a long journey and a difficult path, but I'm sure that we will manage to plant a small seed. I think this is the first time in the metal scene that this is happening - you know, a Greek and Turkish collaboration."

"Politicians start wars, and it's the youth that dies," adds Oganalp. "That's a fact. The same goes on in between Greeks or Turks or Armenians or Serbians and so on and so on. It's us, normal people like you and me, who have to fight each other, driven by false causes or beliefs created by utter imbeciles who sadly have the power to control people's beliefs. Sad, but true. Every human, in my book, is equal. With music, we are hoping" - he stresses the word - "hoping to pass our message to the younger generations. This world has already suffered enough of because of stupid leaders and groups profiting from the madness of war. This is what we hope to pass on as a message, and this is what we live for as people."

As things have turned a bit serious, and not wanting to end on a low note, I ask for some trivia about the band. "Trivia," laughs Oganalp. "OK, the night before we started recording the vocal tracks, we were staying at a five-star hotel, but I'm not used to sleeping in big hotel rooms and I couldn't sleep because of that stadium-like bed and room!" He laughs again at the memory. "I stayed awake till morning and finally dropped dead on a couch. And when I told this to Emrekan, our drummer, who had to sleep in a little room with six people while recording the orchestral parts, his anger was something to see! And also, our guitarist Onur always has amp problems; the amps supplied to him by promoters or studios always go wrong. So, after the fourth time, he decided to buy a new amp. He paid some serious money for this amp, serious money, took it home, and guess what? When he turned it on, the amp exploded!"

Oganalp is almost laughing his head off, and it's Iris who rounds things off. "Thank you for the entertaining interview; it's been a lot of fun. Our best regards from Greece and Turkey."

"And thank you for visiting our Neverland!" adds Oganalp.