

PAGAN'S MIND

MAY 2008

“I WAS CRYING
LIKE A BABY...”

What was it that reduced Pagan's Mind's Steinar Krokmo to tears?

JBs in Dudley is the final point of call Pagan's Mind's UK tour, supporting both Sonata Arctica and their latest album, the exceptional 'God's Equation', and by all accounts things are pretty rosy in the Pagan's Mind garden. "It's going well; very well," nods guitarist Jørn Viggo Lofstad. "It's nice to be here again. We've never been to Dudley before, but it's nice to be back in the UK, and it's definitely been a better tour for us this time around. It's a great opportunity to play with Sonata Arctica anyway, and we also think that a lot of people have come to see us; a lot of people we've been meeting up with have seen us before so I definitely see this as a step up from our previous tour here. We feel blessed in a way that there's a big interest for our band here; it's not every band that can come over here and play so we're very happy about that. Of course, for me I grew up with a lot of British metal bands, a lot of bands from the foundation of heavy metal, and that's another reason why it's really cool to be here."

"And the UK market is very important for us," adds bassist Steinar Krokmo, "because for most European heavy metal bands it's a hard place to get into and so a lot of

them tend to skip the UK or just do one-offs in London; but there are a lot of fans and potential fans here so for us it's very, very important, and this a very good opportunity to



show ourselves off once more."

One big difference between the band's previous UK tour in 2006 (after their debut appearance in the UK at the first ProgPower UK festival) and now is 'God's Equation', an album of which the band

should be justifiably proud...

"We are, definitely," cuts in Steinar before I can actually form a question. "Absolutely," adds Jørn Viggo. "We're very proud of it, every one of us. It's slightly different than our previous albums, but I think the essence is Pagan's Mind: you can hear that it's the same band playing of course but we kind of changed the recipe a little bit. Maybe it's a little less progressive than the others and more..."

"In your face..." supplies Steinar. "Yes, in your face," the guitarist continues, "and a bit heavier. The

two previous albums we mixed in Studio Fredman in Gothenburg; this time we went to Stefan Glaumann at Toytown in Stockholm and I guess we wanted a more organic - still heavy and very tight - but a more organic..."

"Ambient, acoustic sound," Steinar rounds things off. "At the same time we wanted a lot of punch."

"Yes, I think at the time when we started to record the album we had almost made an agreement that we would go to Stefan Glaumann for him to mix it and I think one of the biggest differences is the drum sound actually," says Jørn Viggo. "This time it's 100% acoustic; the previous albums have been with triggers and stuff like that. The thing that really got us onto Stefan was listening

to Rammstein's 'Reise Reise' album - a big heavy sound but still very organic - so we were very happy to go and work with him.

"Regarding the writing process though," comments the bassist, "we still went about

that the same way we always do: get ourselves together in the rehearsal room and jam for hours. Apart from that, we maybe had a bit more focus on strong melodies this time around so it kind of took that direction naturally.”

“The first song that got written for this last album actually was ‘Evolution Exceed’, recalls Jørn Viggo. “That was the first song that we finished, and when we were done

ticular favourites - I tend to listen to different parts of the album at different times.”

Jørn Viggo agrees. “It’s almost impossible to pick out one favourite actually. I think I may have four or five that I really like, but I think all the songs came out really, really well. The ‘God’s Equation’ song is cool, ‘United Alliance’, ‘Atomic Firelight’, ‘Alien Kamikaze’ is really cool, a kind of new song, a dif-

up-to-speed, and ask him where his ideas for lyrics come from, and why they seem to work on so many different levels.

“Wow! That’s a big question!” he pauses. “My main inspiration has always been the mysticism of this whole existence - why are we here? Why do we live? Who is out there? What don’t we see with our eyes? - and a lot of philosophy, I would say. I tend to write my lyrics



with that song, we were thinking, ‘This is something new for us, isn’t it’ - the riff, a new approach, some of the keyboard sounds have been changed, and I guess we were inspired by just wanting to take things further. We had a lot of material that was more similar to what we have done earlier but we just chose to put that aside. There’s a lot of good stuff so we might use that later on, but then again, who knows?”

‘God’s Equation’ being an album with highlight after highlight, I wondered what floated Jørn Viggo and Steinar’s boats. “In terms of songs, you mean?” asks Jørn Viggo. Steinar giggles, not for this last time, and runs with the ball. “Well, actually it’s always a difficult question. I think I really like them all, I don’t have any par-

ferent style of writing for Pagan’s Mind, and for me I very much like how we approached the ‘Hallo Spaceboy’ song, the David Bowie cover. I think I was the one who was aware of that version and just thought it was a real cool song. And as the other songs evolved with the song-writing and stuff and it got introduced to the other guys we just thought that this song could be really cool for our album and we could also add a Pagan’s Mind touch to it. Everyone in the band is very proud of this version. Me personally, I think Nils is doing one of his best vocal performances ever on that song.”

On cue, and with a refrain of, ‘Here I am, rock you like a hurricane!’ vocalist Nils K Rue enters the dressing room from a previous interview. I quickly bring him

in a way that the listener can make up his own mind about them on his - or on her - own. There’s a lot of metaphorical content as well... As for where the inspiration comes from, I would say my own weird brain!” he laughs. “It’s images in my head, what I see in my dreams, books I read, films I see... And my goal is to make people sit up and think. I think that maybe the world could be a better place if everyone took time - and I know this sounds cheesy - to be actually nice to each other; if they could see the whole idea about karma and how everything runs together in harmony...”

But presumably, I add, with the strength of the instrumentation behind him, a boy-meets-girl love song lyric would just never work.

“That’s not going to work;

no,” he agrees. “It’s too simple a recipe for Pagan’s Mind. I’ve had my small love stories in some of the songs but they’re pretty well hidden. One was inspired by an old movie which Robin Williams did, ‘What Dreams May Come’. For a love story for me, that would be the ultimate one: rescuing his wife from Hell from beyond the grave. ‘Dimensions Of Fire’ on ‘Celestial Entrance’, that’s kind of inspired by that movie.”

Times-a-passing, and I can see the guys are needed to join drummer Stian Kristoffersen and keyboard player Ronny Tegner for a soundcheck. So, trying to wrap things up, I ask the guys what of all their good times would be the memory that they’d like to place in a box and keep forever.

“For me definitely the drive back from when we had done ‘Celestial Entrance’,” says Jørn Viggo. “When we mixed that album we were a lot less experienced, and I remember putting on the album in the car for the first time and driving home and I couldn’t believe that it was us! We put a lot of hard work into the album but it came out beyond our expectations; way beyond them.” “I remember Steinar’s tears!” laughs Nils. “Yes,” the bassist confirms. “I was crying like a baby; we were just totally gob-smacked.”

“So that’s something that I would have to agree with,” adds Nils. “We cherish that moment, we really do,” continues Steinar. “But of course there have been many, many highlights: that one stands out particularly, but also, playing all the ProgPower fests, that’s always a highlight for us because they are one-off festivals, well-organised, and people go there to appreciate the kind of music we play. So you have a very dedicated audience at those festivals. Another one is Sweden Rock Festival; we played there in front of an immense audience. The band be-



fore us, another Norwegian band, gathered an audience of about 2-300 people; and we came on half-an-hour after and the place was packed, about 8,000 people there. So that was another gob-smacking moment, really.”

I wondered if they could shed any light on why so many good metal bands are coming from Scandinavia. “I think,” says Steinar, “it’s because now we have the chance to prove ourselves. No-one ever considered Scandinavia as a place to be musically before. OK, you had Abba in the Seventies and stuff like that, but it was hard for us to reach outside of Scandinavia before. But now, you know, all these good bands from Sweden and Norway and Finland have a chance to show themselves off because people are hungry for new-sounding music.”

“And I think also that the previous ten-fifteen years now has been dominated by the extreme black metal wave from Norway,” adds Jørn Viggo. “We had a lot of good metal bands though, like TNT and Conception, bands like that, and we much more belong to that kind of band. When those bands were playing was when we were growing up and we were being inspired by them. I would much more compare us to TNT than Dimmu Borgir, though I like both of them very much. You also have bands like Circus Maximus, also kind of pro-

gressive and very good too; slightly more progressive than us but at the same time with very catchy melodies. Very good players too.”

Steinar’s been dying to make a point but is battling with the drums in the venue. “First of all, can I say I hate drum soundchecks!” he laughs. “But secondly, we’ve actually read that in some places they’re labelled our genre the New Wave Of Norwegian Progressive Metal.”

“Or innovative metal,” suggests Jørn Viggo. “I much prefer that word because ‘progressive’ is like not metal. I think we’re much more about metal than being progressive: yes, there are progressive parts to our music but when you see the band live tonight it’s like ‘boom’” - he throws his arms wide - “explosive!”

“‘Innovative’ is more us,” continues Steinar. “But, coming from Norway, everyone expects us to play black metal, you know? We had to fight even harder to get signed because people thought it was a bit out-dated or lame to play anything else. But good music will always survive, no matter what genre. All the black metal bands still tend to get all the attention; that’s just the way it goes. But we’re in there, fighting our bums off for what we believe in!”