

# THE ART OF NOISE

Par Sundström of Sabaton on 'The Art Of War' - and rubber dragons...

Making our way across Camden's Purple Turtle to find a quiet spot in the venue for a chat, Sabaton bass-

my obvious curiosity and/or confusion and natural lack of grace as I negotiate it, "isn't something you do very often!"

Sabaton played in Glasgow the previous night, the only other UK gig on the tour, which by all accounts went

I asked him if he had any thoughts as to why that should be, and he fires straight back at me. "I know why it is. It's because people have problems buying our CDs. We have a lack of distribution in the UK. It's a big problem; people can't find the CDs and there's no promotion for the albums so very few people know that we actually put them out. People saw us here with Dragonforce, but probably don't think we exist any more. That's our biggest problem here."

Which is a real shame for band approaching their tenth anniversary... "Yeah, next year," Par laughs again,



ist Par Sundström and I both have to clamber over what appears to be a rubber dinosaur blocking one of the venue's corridors. It is, in fact, support band Grail Knights' dragon suit, which some poor sap will have to climb into later on that evening as a part of the Grail Knights' zany set. "Now that," laughs Par, seeing

well. "Oh yes," laughs the bassist. "Last night was full. The people there are very, very crazy, but it's fun to play. It's just a shame that the UK shows are the smallest on the whole tour. We'd love really to become a bigger band in the UK, but at the moment here we are pretty much unknown."

"although we don't really see it like ten years. For sure it was ten years ago when we started to play together but it wasn't really till 2005 that we got to do something, when we had a real album out that we could work with. Before that it was only demos and problems with record labels, very small **1**

shows in Sweden, playing for nothing but costs and hopefully just getting to play the next show. That was a period when we had to struggle a lot. That said, we still struggle a lot! There are some countries where it's working very well for us, but there's still a whole world to be conquered. So I still count it as 2005 being the start of the band but yes, next year is in reality our tenth anniversary. We will be doing something special, that's for sure."

Back in 2005 Sabaton self-financed what they see as their debut album 'Primo Victoria', a risky plan, I would have thought. Par disagrees. "We didn't feel that at the time. Because when we had the songs, we knew that it could not fail. You see, we had the first three songs so we went to record labels and asked, 'Are you interested in this?' and they were interested but they weren't as interested as we wanted them to be. So we said, 'OK, back off, back off; if you don't give us good enough offers, back off and we'll make the album by ourselves and then you'll see what we can do.' So that's what we did. Then we went back to the record labels that had showed interest and suddenly they were crawling after us. So it wasn't really a big risk because we knew it was going to work, otherwise we wouldn't have done it. And, you know, I'm relieved we did it this way because it gave us more control."

The follow-up, the equally strong 'Attero Dominatus' vindicated their position. "Well, 'Primo Victoria' didn't make much impact on Europe when it was released. At that time it made quite an impact on Sweden, but we had Sweden conquered already. On the underground it made an impact in parts of Europe where it was the album of the year, release of the century or something," he laughs again, "but it was 'Attero Dominatus' that took it that step further and opened a lot more doors for us. Then 'Metalizer' came out but that didn't really do much for us."

'Metalizer' was the band's original debut, recorded in 2002 for an Italian label but not released till 2007, double-packed with the full length early demo 'Fist For Fight'. "We just

wanted it to be released as a fan edition kind of thing, just something for the fans, and not promoted as a new Sabaton album. We just wanted to get it out, kind of slipped it though and then we said, 'OK, let's put all our focus on 'The Art Of War' when it is released,' and then things really got into gear."



All of which brings us neatly to the band's more recent offering. Although there is some dispute as to who Sun Tzu was and exactly when he lived (there's a possible time frame of something like 722 - 421 BC depending on whom you read), his name has lived on through his book 'The Art Of War', an influential reference work for both generals and politicians throughout the ages and still studied at military academies today. "It's a very relevant book," Par suggests. "You see it in movies and video games, so you get reminders everywhere, and you can buy it in most book stores. Joakim [vocalist Joakim Brodén] came up with it so we all read it through and thought, 'Yes; there's nothing really to think about, it's a really good idea. You know, here we can find some ideas and mix them with what we already have; we can make it more of a concept with a closer binding between the songs instead of just a loose collection of songs about war.' So it's like chapter by chapter - we linked the songs to the chapters in the book, trying to keep things as close as possible to the book. And I think we made a good job of it."

There is, of however, always the fear of mis-interpretation when metal bands talk about war... "Of course, there could be people who mis-understand the lyrics - there

are - but I mean it's up to them." Par shakes his head. "If they think that we advocate war, or mis-read the lyrics and hear what they want to hear and they hear some things that are not true, that's up to them. We don't really care. If they want to make a big noise and complain and do whatever they want, go ahead, we don't care. We write the songs and if you read the lyrics you understand the meaning of the song. We don't encourage like, 'Go to war; fight and die'; to us it's more like, 'This is what happened, don't let it happen again.'"

"I mean, what we wanted to do is..." he continues. "Well, many bands write good heavy metal songs, but they skip on the lyrics; they just make up some 'oh yesterday I fucked a girl' stuff. But I think that lyrics are as important to making a good song as the guitar riffs and the drumming; you need to have all pieces carefully in place, and lyrics that people care about are very important. I think a lot of people care about our lyrics so this is one of the reasons we want to write songs that people think about."

Going back to the early days, I ask Par if it had been a long journey from 'Metalizer' to the here and now. "Of course," he replies, "and we've seen so many things go wrong, and we've seen things go right, so we've learned on the journey; and because it didn't go too fast, it took a long time, seeing all those decisions through, not putting our fate in the hands of a manager, or a record label, and so still being able in our own way to look into every advertisement, every CD sale, so that we always know what's going on with the band. I'm kind of happy that it didn't explode right from the start because this gave us the opportunity to actually have full control of the band, and now we have become quite experienced in the music business we are quite capable of not needing a full management to take us to the next level."

And the highlights of the journey? "I guess when you get offers to play the main stage at Graspop and stuff like that, and when you stand there and see all these thousands and thousands and thousands **2**

of people reaching beyond your eyesight, and it's like 'Wow! They are actually singing along with us, jumping up and down' and there are tens and tens and tens of thousands of people doing this. 'Wow! I'm happy now,' you know? It actually worked. What we have done actually worked. So that's like a highlight, to be on such big stages, to see all the people who love what we actually do. And also to be able to go on this tour - there have been a few moments that are really, really powerful to feel; we've come back to the same venues we played almost one-and-a-half years ago when we were the opening band for Therion and Gravedigger, and now we sell them out by ourselves. This is amazing, you know, arriving in a club and thinking, 'OK, we played here one-and-a-half years ago; then we were a little band opening for two bigger bands. And now we are as big a band as those two bands!' That's pretty special."

So what is Sabaton, I ask. How would you describe the essence of Sabaton? Par considers the question. "In the end, we are a heavy metal band with a lot of fire. We love to be on stage, we always have fun on stage. And the core of the band I think is that we love what we do. I know there's a lot of bands who will say this but there are some bands who don't really put everything into it. We've given up so much for this band; we are a family, we stick together, and our crew, and everyone who knows us, says it's always fun to travel with Sabaton because it's a very relaxed, very fun team to go on tour with. I would say that we are a very relaxed party band who still write songs for people to care about." He smiles. "Yeah, that's us!"