

## SIRENIA

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Morten Veland of  
Sirenia talks about  
'The 13th Floor'

Toward the tail end of 2006 Sirenia unveiled the promos for their album 'Nine Destinies And A Downfall'; the songs on the whole were shorter than those on its predecessors 'At Sixes And Sevens' (2002) and 'An Elixir For Existence' (2004), and there was an expectation that this album would take the band to the next level. Things didn't go particularly to script though,

and, as great an album as 'Nine Destinies...' was, it didn't turn out to be the catalyst it was supposed to be.

Fast forward two years, and with a new line-up Sirenia are back with their fourth full length album, 'The 13th Floor'. Given the fact that the band seem to be back where they were two years ago, the first thing I wanted to know was what Morten hoped to achieve with 'The 13th Floor'. "A diverse album," he replies. "I wanted to make an album that was kind of a reflection of what

we have done so far with Sirenia musically, as well as a very diverse album with some material that would represent what we've done earlier and, at the same time, bring in some new elements. I think that when people listen to the album they will find things on there that will remind them of what we were doing on our debut album 'At Sixes And Sevens' and some of the stuff is in the same style as 'An Elixir For Existence' and some stuff is in the same style as our previous album 'Nine Destinies And A Downfall'. And there's also some new things that the listeners haven't heard from Sirenia before so... So yeah, for me



LUCKY 13?

this album is like taking three steps behind and then one step forward at the same time," he laughs.

Although there was a huge jump from 'An Elixir For Existence' to 'Nine Destinies And A Downfall', the progression with the new album is more subtle. I put it to Morten that 'The 13th Floor' is more of an extension of 'Nine Destinies...' than a major progression. Sirenia's main man agrees. "Yeah, absolutely; I mean, when I composed the debut album it was a new start for me in a way [having parted company acrimoniously with Tristana] and I composed exactly the album that I wanted at the time. I always considered 'An Elixir For Existence' as the natural next move, in a way, but when I began working on 'Nine Destinies And A Downfall' I felt strongly about doing something different. There was a need for bigger changes, because I had come to a point where I felt I had pretty much done everything within that style; I needed to do something quite different because I didn't want to end up in a situation where I began to repeat myself. So yeah, the change from 'An Elixir For Existence' to 'Nine Destinies And A Downfall' was quite a big one. Some people were happy with that, some people were not happy with that... But for me, it was either going to be 'Nine Destinies And A Downfall' or there wasn't going to be an album at all! But the new album, 'The 13th Floor' feels like a natural 'album number four'. We also put a lot of focus on a very powerful production although the melodic elements are also there, both in regard to the vocals and the way we arranged the music; but we wanted to make a massive, powerful album and drop in some nice melodies and nice orchestrations and fill in with all the different kind of elements that are typical for a Sirenia album."

'The 13th Floor' is bookended in an interesting way, with a kick-ass opener 'The Path To Decay'...

"Yes, I think it's a great opening track," Morten cuts in. "It's like the perfect single song from this album, again a short, intense song that represents the whole album which, for Sirenia, can be a bit difficult," he laughs, "because there's a lot of different stuff in our songs – especially with this album. But I think 'The Path To Decay' shows pretty much what we are about musically. A short, intense, but catchy song."

Meanwhile, at the end of the album, the other song that really stands out for me, but which is atypical because it's pretty much a completely male vocal, is 'Sirens Of The Seven Seas', sung by former collaborator Jan Kenneth Barkved. "As I've said, I wanted things on this album that would take us back in time and I think probably that song reminds me most of the 'At Sixes And Sevens' days since we also used Jan Kenneth a lot on that album. It's quite different also from the rest of the songs on the album but for me the song feels a bit nostalgic; it feels like I wrote the song eight-nine years ago but I wrote it very recently, in fact it was one of the last songs I did for the album so it's very new. But it turned out pretty cool, I think."

'The 13th Floor' will introduce two new faces alongside Morten and drummer Jonathon A Perez. The first is raven-haired singer, Ailyn. "Ah yeah," Morten replies, "it was a very long process this time to find a replacement when our previous singer left. We

just went on with our work and then put out an official statement and spread that all over the internet and very shortly the emails started flooding in. We received more than five hundred applications so, yeah, it was a lot of work. We sat down and listened carefully to every single demo song we received and read through tons of biographies and in the end we got down to five top candidates who we



invited to auditions in Norway. We had two rounds of auditions. The first one was a studio audition where the singers got to record some old Sirenia songs and record some new ones, so we could check out how they would work in the studio and how their voices would fit both with the new Sirenia songs and also how they would handle the old songs. The second round of auditions was in the rehearsal room with the whole band. We rehearsed a live set of about, I think, eight songs, both old and new material. We

rehearsed for a weekend so the singers got to know the songs, and when that was done we rented a concert hall with all the equipment we needed, set up a bunch of cameras, and performed the live set just as if it was a real concert, filming the whole thing. This gave us an impression of how the singers would dress on stage, how their image would look, how they would act and sing and all these things. I mean, you can't really compare it to a real concert, of course, but it was just to get some impressions. And when all that was done, we sat down and everybody in the band was pretty clear about who was the favourite, and everybody was in favour of the same singer. At that point Ailyn became our singer, but the process took about seven months. When we did the auditions we only did one singer at a time and a whole weekend at a time so it took a lot of time and money, but we're really happy we did it because it had to be done and because it had to be done properly this time. We wanted to be 100% sure that we'd made the correct choice for the band."

The other newbie in the Sirenia camp is guitarist Michael S Krumin. Bjørnar Landa left in May 2008, and Michael had previously worked with Jonathon in Trail Of Tears. "It was so much easier to find a new guitarist," recalls Morten. "Bjørnar called me and told me that he wanted to leave. He'd already mentioned it to me a month before so I was aware that it was coming, and also he did so at a quiet time, which was good. The reason he decided to leave is that he has two small kids, a wife, and he was going to pick up on his studies again; he just didn't have the time any more to give Sirenia his full attention. The same day he talked to me I called Jonathon, and then Jonathon called Michael that evening. Michael had been playing in Green Carnation for some years but he'd recently left the band and was searching for a new one. So in just a matter of hours we had a new guitar

player. He's been a good friend of Jonathon's for, well, since they were children, they've been playing in bands together, different projects and stuff, and he's a great guy, a very professional musician, educated and working on a masters degree at the music conservatory in Kristiansand. So he's a great friend and a very professional musician; the per-



fect replacement for us."

The other change fans will notice onstage is that for the first time Sirenia will be taking out a live bassist [Kristian Olav Torp] which, I remarked, which will obviously affect the onstage dynamic. "Absolutely! It will also be a big lift for both our sound and our visual representation. The line-up we have at the moment is really strong; I'm really happy with it and it's going to take Sirenia to the next level as a live band. So we're really eager to get on the road now and start touring and present the new album live and, yeah, we can't wait to get started with playing concerts again with this line-up."

We've both been skirting around the elephant in the room, as far as I can see. The departure of previous singer Monika Pedersen, whom Morten hasn't actually named at any stage in the conversation, was a bit of a blow to the band at the time.

The announcement of her departure was posted on Sirenia's website on 5th November 2007, just about two weeks after the band's abysmal performance at the fifth Metal Female Voices Festival. Their display was at best disappointing and at worst inept, and although singling the vocalist out would be unfair to her – there were no heroes that night – her performance was, frankly, embarrassing. Monika's official statement ran: "The reason is that we have too many musical differences and I don't feel like it's the right band for me..." although of course 'musical differences' is often musi-



cian speak for 'fuck you'. So, given the debacle in Wieze, did she jump or was she pushed? Morten still doesn't sound very happy to discuss this topic. "Well, Monika decided to leave, I think it was, in November last year. She stated 'musical differences' as her reason for leaving but I think she just wanted to do her own thing musically. Maybe she found out it was not the right thing for her, I'm not quite sure, but that I guess that was the reason she decided to go – to do her own things."

I press the point that the show was, being polite, terrible, and that she didn't look at all comfortable (or even sober) on stage that night. "I can't actually remember it that

well," he replies. "There were a lot of problems at that festival with the guy who was arranging it, and he caused a lot of trouble for Sirenia there. So there were a lot of things affecting our show and the circumstances around it, and it was a bit uncomfortable for us. We were not happy with that festival. I mean the audience and everything was fantastic but the festival itself, the crew and the guy who runs the festival, well, I really feel that he let us down in a way."

To be fair, it was obvious that Bjørnar's pedal board was giving no end of problems as the band were setting up, and this ate into their time and led to their set being curtailed. "Yes, that's correct, yes... Everything bad just came at one time. Sometimes that happens; you have a really bad day but you just have to deal with it and make the best out of it. There's not much else you can do..." he stonewalls.

Hmm, I draw a line here as we're not really getting anywhere, but I feel I have to point out that I know of no other band that has ever complained about what appears to be top-notch and extremely friendly organisation at Metal Female Voices.

To end on a more positive note, I ask about the band's new video, and Morten becomes animated once more. "Yeah, we were in Gothenburg, Sweden a few weeks ago where we shot our video for 'The Path To Decay' which will be released in the beginning of January. That was a cool experience. We were working with Patric Ullaeus who has worked with bands like In Flames, Dimmu Borgir, Within Temptation; he is a really experienced guy and he knows what rock 'n' roll and metal videos are all about. He has his own unique style of making videos and I'm really happy with the way ours turned out; it's quite original I think – I cannot come up with any other videos that look like it in any way. It's a very cool video and it's going to be cool to have it out there and see what the

fans think as well."

Finally, I couldn't help pointing out that unlike all its predecessors, this album has a relatively straightforward title. Or does it? Morten laughs. "I always like album titles that are not too derivative, titles that have a symbolic or deeper meaning or things that you can think and wonder about. Everyone pretty much knows about the number 13 and so on so it's obvious in one way but in the other way," he laughs again, "I guess it's not that obvious! But of course the title is spinning around superstition..." he trails off. "I've been told that there was a movie back in the late Nineties with the same title and people ask me if there is any reference to that on the album, but I didn't actually know about that movie until I began doing interviews for this album so no" – you can almost hear him shaking his head down the phone – "not this time. But who knows?"