

WORSEN – THE HEADACHE OF LIVING

One of the best one-man metal bands out there is Worsen, which is run by the North Carolina based multi-instrumentalist Rick Contes, who some of you might also know from Ayr, Votnut and the defunct Young and in the Way. Five years ago, Rick impressed me with Worsen's first EP "*Blood*". After several years of silence, Worsen finally presents its first full-length album "*Cursed to witness life*", a violent and somber 40 minute record which seems to be a very personal and cathartic one for the American musician. (JOKKE)



Hi Rick, it took you seven years to release your first full length with Worsen, not taking into account the "*Blood*" EP (2014) and split-tape with Whiteworm (2016). In what way was "*Cursed to witness life*" a difficult record to release?

When Worsen began in 2012, I didn't set out to immediately begin working on a full length album. I did some demos in 2012 that were never released, followed by the EP and the split. During that time I was very active in several other bands, so my time to spend on Worsen was limited and wasn't a primary focus for me. Along with that, writing music alone can be a challenge as it's a self-critical process.

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Worsen is a one-man band although you are (or were) also part of other bands like Ayr, Votnut and Young and in the Way where you worked together with other musicians. Why did you choose the loner path for Worsen and what are some of the advantages and disadvantages of working alone?

The main advantage I have when it comes to working alone is the ability to record my own music in my home studio. I have spent a lot of time writing and recording records with other people and playing live shows, so I wanted to take on something where I could make every decision without the requirement of running ideas by other people and without the obligation of playing live. The disadvantage to that process is the absence of organic collaboration with like-minded musicians.

I hear many similarities in sound with bands such as Męła and Uada, who are quite popular these days. Also Nachtmystium and Swedish bands such as Dissection pop-up as musical influences. Can you live with these references?

You said it yourself; those bands are quite popular these days. I think people go to the comparison of Męła simply because they are one of the most well-known current black metal bands and most people voicing those comparisons aren't listening to records as a whole or listening past surface of one song. I do understand the general comparison though. I do appreciate the comparisons of Nachtmystium and Dissection, both of which I love. Those are comparisons people may find when listening harder.

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In my opinion, Worsen is the perfect example of how black metal can sound anno 2019 without copying the old bands or sounding generic. Which new bands do you consider as ambassadors of modern day black metal?

Thanks, I appreciate that. When it comes to modern day black metal...Whoredom Rife, Misþyrming, Sinmara and One Tail One Head are some that come to mind. Outside of those, I'm not really sure. Lately I've been really into a band from the US called Dark Blue who released an amazing record this year called "*Victory is rated*". Also, Whipstriker from Brazil, who released a fucking great record called "*Merciless artillery*" last year.

Do you consider taking Worsen to the stage? I really believe in the bands' potential that could increase by playing live and reaching out to more people.

I agree, performing live increases awareness of the music and can take things to a new level but it's not something I'm interested in doing right now.

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The album and some of the song titles sound rather pessimistic and I read that the record is quite a personal and cathartic one. Do you feel better now the album and the music are released? Is music some kind of therapy for you?

Any musician feels better after releasing music they have spent years working on. This is definitely a type of “therapy” for me and I think it’s safe to say that is the case with most musicians. *“Cursed to witness life”* touches on a lot of negative things that have occurred in my life over the last few years but this record is mostly about the pain of watching my brother pass away from cancer. This is what makes it such a personal and cathartic album.

Although the record certainly has it’s aggressive moments, I hear an evolution towards the use of more melodic elements in Worsen’s music. Where you deliberately searching for more mellow parts to increase the dynamics and play with contrasts?

The new album had a lot more focus on guitar melodies, harmonies and song structuring as a whole. I think that’s how those elements became more present. It wasn’t deliberate, so I guess you can call it a natural progression. I just write what I feel like writing. My next release could lose those melodic elements and go to a more raw sound.

Which guitar players influence your melodic solo’s and leads?

I’ve been a fan of The Devil’s Blood for a long time. I’ll never be the guitarist that Selim Lemouchi was but I can certainly cite his work as an influence. Beyond that, Taake. My Dying Bride and Failure have a great influence on me when it comes to solos and leads.

Both on the EP and album cover, one can see an animal skull. What animal is it and what does this skull symbolizes for you? Are you a collector of animal skulls and bones?

There is a theme here. *“Blood”* and *“Cursed to witness life”* are part of a trilogy. I’m not collector but my old band had a very large collection of bones and skulls that were used on stage, which is where the skulls seen on these album covers came from. *“Blood”* represents birth or in a way, being forced into the world. You can see my hands gripped around the skull tightly holding it out as if it’s being offered to something. On *“Cursed to witness life”*, you can see a candle burning on top of the skull, candle wax dripping down, surrounded by dirt and mud. This is essentially the headache of living. The flame of life that burns dropping it’s shit all over us. Eventually that flame will burn out.



***“Cursed to witness life”* is released on your own label The Hell Command. Is this a brand new label or a continuation of the now defunct Atrum Cultus label?**

In a way, it’s both. The Hell Command is a brand new label but I’ve decided to make certain releases from Atrum Cultus available through The Hell Command.

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What other bands did you sign and what can we expect from the label in the near future?

I released a cassette for a band from Greensboro, NC called BloodRitual as well as a cassette for a hardcore band from Wilmington, NC called Invoke. Going forward, The Hell Command is focused on releasing my own music and other related projects. Up next are releases from Ayr and Raw Hex, which will be followed by the next Worsen release.

Through which European distributors can we buy your label releases?

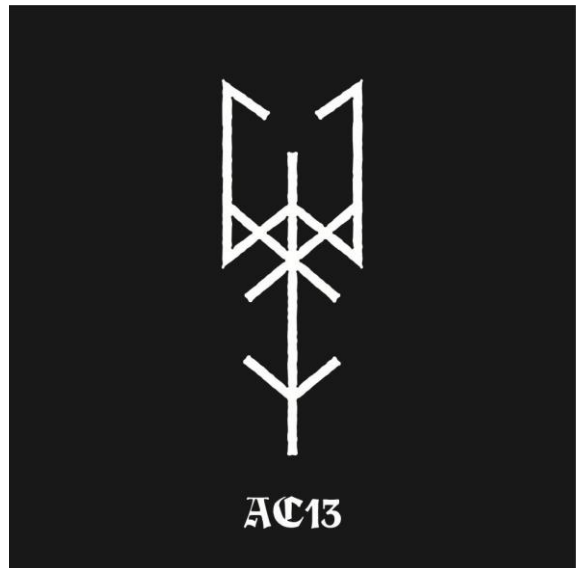
None at this time but there will be soon. My friend Georgios (Dodsrit, Nuclear Devastation) runs a label called Wolves of Hades out of Amsterdam. Several of my releases will become available through Wolves of Hades soon.

According to Metal Archives, your other band Ayr is back from the dead after a seven-year long hiatus. Why was the band re-activated?

Ayr is partnership between my friend Randall and I. We never put Ayr on an official hiatus but I suppose that's what it has been. We were both just very active in other bands from 2012-2017 and didn't have the time to dedicate to Ayr. However, we did find some time to track drums and some guitars for new music about 6 years ago. Last year I revisited this session in my studio, resumed work on it and ended up finishing all guitars, bass, keyboards and vocals. A final mix was completed earlier this year followed by mastering. It's a 5 song album over about 40 minutes. We're hoping to have it released by Fall 2019.

Both Worsen and Ayr are part of the AC//13, which is some kind of 'circle' I presume? Can you shed some light on this group of people or bands?

AC//13 was a kinship of like-minded musicians that participated in many different projects together. Bands affiliated were Young and in the Way, Worsen, Ayr, Votnut and Raven Mocker. This was directly related to the label Atrum Cultus, which everyone involved helped operate. Two of the major creative forces that were part of the AC//13 are no longer involved in music. This is one of the reasons for the dissolution of the Atrum Cultus and the creation of The Hell Command.



Any other musical activities you have in the pipeline?

I play guitar in Raw Hex, which is a continuation of the band Votnut. We have a record coming out soon on the label Closed Casket Activities and we will be playing shows. Ayr will be releasing the new full-length album called "The dark" this Fall. Outside of that, I'm forming ideas for the next Worsen release now and my wife and I will be working on a project together soon. I'll be staying busy.

This interview was written for Addergebroed on June 30, 2019.