

## ENTHRONED – THE BALANCE BETWEEN WHAT YOU SEE AND DON'T SEE

Together with Ancient Rites, Belgian black metal horde Enthroned, was one of the pioneers of the Belgian black metal scene. Records such as "*Prophecies of pagan fire*" (1995) and "*Towards the skullthrone of Satan*" (1997) are part of the Belgium's collective black metal memory. In 2006, founding member, vocalist and bassist Sabathan left Enthroned and guitarist Nornagest took over vocal duties. On the records that were released by this "Enthroned 2.0 version", one could hear a steady evolution towards a more atmospheric and diverse sound that is fully explored on "*Cold black suns*", Enthroned's eleventh record. Guitar player Neraath, who has been a member of the band since almost twenty years now, gives some insights in the universe of Enthroned. (JOKKE)



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**Hi Neraath, between "*Sovereigns*" and your new record "*Cold black suns*" lies a five-year-gap, which is rather unusual for Enthroned. Why did it take so long for you to come with a new album?**

Hi Johan. I agree, this time, it took longer than we thought. There are a few reasons for it... After the promotional work, touring and gigs for the "*Sovereigns*" album, I spent some time with former bass player Phorgath to focus and work on our other musical project. That album with Emptiness was a long writing process, and our creativity was deeply entangled there for a while. Then, unfortunately, Enthroned faced a line-up change; two members left the band, including Phorgath, who used to be quite involved in the songwriting and arrangements... When it felt a bit like slipping away, Menthor (drums), who was also busy with side-projects (Lvcifyre, Nightbringer), took the initiative to gather everyone back with a vision on this new album, the band recruited two musicians, got a deal with a new record company, working on demos for new material, few studio sessions at different timings, mix and mastering, to end up on the waiting process of the album to get manufactured and released at the label's agenda.

## ENTHRONED – THE BALANCE BETWEEN WHAT YOU SEE AND DON'T SEE

**“Cold black suns” is the first record without Phorgath, who not only was Enthroned’s bass player for 11 years but also contributed to writing music. Did his leave make it more difficult for both Nornagest and you to come up with new music?**

He brought a lot to the stylistic leap that we were developing on these previous albums, and the band was meeting up often to compose all-together in our studio. Nowadays, the writing process has been different, but not more difficult. There was a more individual way of writing songs, and I would say the improvement has been focused on arrangements and another approach to the dynamic of the music. We shared the task together with Menthor and Nornagest, but Phorgath still contributed on this record, besides the production work, he had a few ideas on the vocal arrangements to push this sonic trip even further.

**Enthroned has had to deal with many line-up changes in the past. Your new guitar player Shagāl is from Argentina while drummer Mentor hails from Portugal. How did this international line-up came into place? Has it become difficult for Enthroned to find dedicated musicians in Belgium?**

Shagāl lives in Belgium since long ago and has been helping us as a session guitarist during the past two years. When we were looking for a new member, he was quite motivated to join the band, and also he knew about how we’re organized and our way of working. Menthor is from Portugal but he currently lives in London, which makes it easier to come around when we have to play. We met some time ago while he was recording in our studio (Blackout Studio) in Brussels. He was performing for the band Corpus Christii, and we got along quite well. We were also very impressed by his drumming technique. When our former drummer decided to leave extreme music for something more synthetic and experimental, Menthor accepted our offer. He also became a close friend of mine since then. Our new bass player Norgaath comes from Belgium, finally! He’s actually from West Flanders.



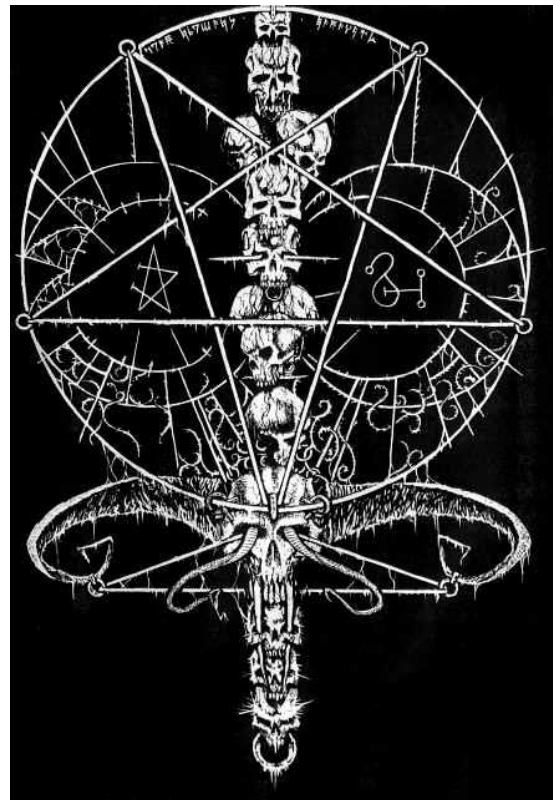
## ENTHRONED – THE BALANCE BETWEEN WHAT YOU SEE AND DON'T SEE

**Enthroned is a band with a strong occult and satanic view. Is it equally important for new members to share not only a musical vision but also your views on religion and occultism?**

To be honest, the views upon spirituality, philosophy and occultism isn't something we deeply share within the whole band. Some members of the band have an interest in the arcane of esoteric sciences, but we gather to write music, not essays. It's undeniable that there's a common attraction for it, I'd say, on the surface, but the few time we all meet is essentially about rehearsals and music practice. We all agree on the music direction for Enthroned, but we don't all fully share the same vision and tastes outside this project.

**Can I say that your new album *"Cold black suns"* is the most experimental and diverse Enthroned-record to this day?**

I can't really agree about the term of an experimental, as this is still quite conventional for the genre of extreme music. As we're all still driven to write and play obscure and aggressive tones, the music we play today has to be conform to who we are now, thus our sound evolves with experiences, taste, personal input and also skills as musicians. Therefore, you will obviously hear a significant difference if you play our first records compared to these latest ones. This is the logical continuity when we're honest with ourselves. I agree that it is the most diverse, as there was a will to develop atmospheres further than we previously did, and add that murky layer in the whole ambience. First of all, the tuning changed, the drumming and rhythmic approach has been thought further, then later, during the arrangements, I worked on keyboard pads and drones and few ambient guitars to integrate them within the mix. Some of the tracks have more of an instrumental approach than proper "song structures". These shady details merge together to increase the album's identity in its whole concept.



**Songs like *"Silent redemption"* and *"Son of man"* seem to be all about atmosphere rather than aggression. Was it a deliberate choice to explore new musical territories or was this simply the music that flew out of you while writing new songs?**

When we started to gather to work on the composition, Menthor and I were driven by the idea to have more twisted and dissonant guitar licks, a different approach of the sound and composition, where a clash of intense fast parts and more atmospheric ones, yet catchy, would build the record. I've heard plenty of times that these eerie tones are typical for the music I write, and this is what comes naturally when I compose. As I mentioned previously, the songwriting was more personal this time, and in my approach, I have the tendency to privilege ambiances over 'riffing'. I like to use a certain type of chords or note progressions, and I have a love for a few reverb pedals and gear set-up.

## ENTHRONED – THE BALANCE BETWEEN WHAT YOU SEE AND DON'T SEE

**A song like “Aghoria” really stands out with its mantra-like chanting. What is the story behind this song?**

“Aghoria” was one of the first songs that popped out during the writing process. Nornagest and Menthor had the idea of a song that had that ritualistic approach in its trance-like simplicity, very repetitive and in reference to the small group of hindi sadhus named Aghori. As the album’s lyrics and concept depict few different cultures, it was interesting to build a track about these devotees of Shiva. You can read more about them and their unusual way of living. The mantra sang during the song means “*I am glad to claim that I have not been able to prove myself*”. From this original idea of rhythmic and basic drumming, I took the chance to develop a few layers of abrasive keyboard, together with sampling and effect process, and few members of the band gathered behind the microphones in studio to record the mantra and these low tone voices typical of Far East countries.

**“Oneiros” seems to bear some oriental influences although the song title refers to the Greek mythology. What is this song about?**

This one is probably one of my favorite tracks on the album, as we play a lot with dynamics and emotions within the song. “Oneiros” is a personification of dreams. To understand the lyrics, one has to refer to Homer who claimed that dreams dwell on the dark shores of the Western Oceanus. Deceitful dreams would come through an Ivory Gate, a description that in Roman Catholicism is given to the gates of the Heavens, kingdom of Yahveh, while the true ones are issued from a gate made of black horns. Sometimes those dreams procure a sadistic approach of arousal that the ancient Greeks called “*Charoumenos Oneiros*”.

**All these details like choirs and samples make it an interesting listening, even after a dozen of times. Is it usually clear from the beginning which additional “special ingredients” a specific song requires or do these ideas pop up in the studio when the final form of the songs becomes clear?**

For this album, these details were part of the composition work. From basic ideas (understand rhythm and riff) I took my time and truly enjoyed to develop and integrate plenty of elements during the writing process, like processed clean guitars and keyboards. Choirs came up after, during the last process of recording vocals in the studio, and at the very end, few samples were added when the mix balance was more clear.

**Neraath, you also created the stunning artwork, which is not so typically Enthroned. It seems rather abstract, but it wouldn’t be Enthroned if there’s not a lot more going on in the background of the cover. The serpent-like figure reminds me of an Ouroboros. What can you tell me about the meaning of the artwork in relation to the music (if there is any)?**

Thanks. There is a relation with the music and the title. First, the words “cold” and “black” pushed me to go for a more minimalist artwork than we did in the past. I was insisting not to have a logo on the front cover, to stay in the abstraction and having no direct reference to a group of musicians, in an attempt to keep some sort of inhumanity feeling. Then the word “suns” lead to an image that has some cosmic references.

To go further in the concept, I tried to depict a connection of the macroscopic dimension of universal space with the microcosm that composes us, for example, at the cellular level and beyond. There are two main spheres on the cover, one floating in front of its contrary, as a direct reference to matter and

## ENTHRONED – THE BALANCE BETWEEN WHAT YOU SEE AND DON'T SEE

anti-matter. Modern science is still attempting to understand how one prevailed upon its opposite and how it succeeds in becoming all that we can observe and experience in daily life. The fact that these two spheres hold inside three points makes another reference to a universal principle. There are three intelligible worlds that correspond to each other by hierarchical analogy, the physical world, the spiritual world (or metaphysic) and the divine world.



At last, as you mentioned it, having the visual reference to the snake evokes the tradition of the Ouroboros, which in its famous circular representation shows the totality of the universe and contains at the same time the ideas of movement and continuity. Through its skeletal appearance, it gives this balance between life and death; the material as well as the immaterial. So it's a whole concept of balance between what you see and what you don't see.

I had a good time making this artwork, with Menthor's help, painting a huge box in black and placing the spheres in it, taking a few photographs, then using spray paint and chemicals and finish with computer work. There were a few versions of the cover, and the band agreed on this one.

**Neraath, You are now for nearly twenty years part of Enthroned with only vocalist Nornagest being longer in the band. What do you consider the highlights of the bands career and what were the downsides for Enthroned?**

The highlight is probably to keep a project running that long and still have the same motivation to write albums, and every album out marks a period and is a highlight in itself. The downsides are the numerous line-up changes and issues that go together.

**Did you draw some personal learnings out of your career with Enthroned? How did the band affect your personal life and vice versa?**

Playing for so many years with the band gave me the chance to travel worldwide and see plenty of countries and the atmosphere that reigns in many of them. It brings a lot to the personal life, as you feel more aware about the world you live in. Of course, there is not much room for tourism, and you keep to the same kind of circuit, but not hanging in the fancy places gives more authenticity of how things are. When it comes to the band itself, there are good moments but also more difficult ones. That's one thing when you decide to work in team, even if there's that pride when the job is properly done, you got to make compromises, and it feels affective. It demands also quite a personal and material investment too, and it's a pity that this scene is so underground in our own country. I know this style isn't for everyone, but there is truly no support what so ever from higher cultural institutions, and thus everything is too much "DIY". The movement expanded a lot since the 90's, and it feels that everything remains the same and can't fully reach the way it should, on a local scale.

## ENTHRONED – THE BALANCE BETWEEN WHAT YOU SEE AND DON'T SEE

**This weekend Enthroned will perform at Throne Fest in Kuurne. What can we expect from this release show, the only show being planned in Belgium for now?**

We will play a new set list with a few songs from “*Cold black suns*” and from the three last albums. We’re currently working on it, with new members in the technical crew. As usual, it will just be ourselves with our instruments, aiming to deliver something intense and authentic. No fancy stage decoration, just the band.



© Leslie VDM

**For some reason, it seems to me that Enthroned is more popular outside of Belgium and specifically in South America, a continent that you frequently visited with tours. How do you compare the Latin-American audience compared to the Belgian or European one?**

Definitely more intense and crazy than here. Perhaps it is due to the fact that plenty of these countries carry some social violence on a daily scale and it would be a sort of invisible influence on the behavior. Paradoxically, these people are very kind and welcoming, somehow careless too, but when a band plays, you observe a bigger devotion and appreciation of the music. I think about countries like El Salvador, Ecuador, Guatemala, Bolivia... No need to say, the music we play is violent and tenebrous, compared to mainstream music, and it happens few times that it degenerates in the crowd. For example, we witnessed stabbings on the last tour, and we had to rush to leave the venue after the show as things turned quite nasty. Few days after, some kind of small riot happened in another place while the opening band was performing. I think it’s quite frequent in these countries.

## ENTHRONED – THE BALANCE BETWEEN WHAT YOU SEE AND DON'T SEE

**Last year, Sabathan decided to start performing classic Enthroned-songs from the first two records and EP under his own name. I see it as a good thing since I assume that you would rather focus on playing your newer songs. People who swear by the old-stuff, however, will be satisfied by going to a Sabathan-show. What are your thoughts on this and do you still have contact with Sabathan?**

I'm still in contact with him from time to time. We decided to focus our set on newer material being more representative for us today, thus, people who truly prefer 'old-Enthroned' can have the opportunity to see it live. For sure, the "Sabathan" project hasn't been unnoticed within the band, and opinions differ, but personally I'm not against it, as he wrote plenty of songs for these older albums and still plays them with the same passion than on the very first days. You know there are a lot of nostalgic people in the metal scene, and a trend for revival...you can't really blame people to have a good time.



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**To conclude this interview I wanted to dedicate a few words to Of Blood And Mercury, the dark pop band you form together with your partner Michelle Nocon. What can we expect after the very promising debut EP "*Strangers*"?**

Michelle and I are yet finishing our album, it will be ready in a few months and released soon after. More will be said about it on the right time. In the meantime, we're now looking for the opportunities to play live with this brand new band, and we'll put the effort to bring the best out of it. The style we're doing with Of Blood and Mercury is totally different than what we were used to play for decades, but it is done with heart and soul and we're truly enjoying that direction. The live line up also features the drummer Jonas Sanders, known for his work with Pro-Pain and Emptiness, and the talented keyboard player David Alexandre Parquier, who releases dark-wave albums with his own project Luminance. Michelle and I were working on this project for long, and now it finally takes life.

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