

HOPE DRONE – DRIVEN BY OPTIMISTIC NIHILISM

Four years after releasing their monolithic "*Cloak of ash*" on Relapse Records, Brisbane's Hope Drone return on August 30 with a new meditation on personal and existential despair in the form of "*Void lustre*". Crafted with patience and restraint, the album sees the band travel further down the textured and dynamic pathways forged by their previous work as they dance from austere atmospheres to crashing walls of sound through frenetic blasts and thunderous dirges. Blending the likes of black metal, sludge and post-rock with influences even further afield the band creates a rich sound that is as beautiful as it is devastating. Ever since the release of their fantastic self-titled EP in 2013, I wanted to interview the band. Now the time seemed right. (JOKKE)



Hi guys, are you nervous now the long-awaited new record "*Void lustre*" is about to be released?

Karl (guitar, noise): For me personally it is more a feeling of relief that it will finally be released.

It has been four long years since the release of "*Cloak of ash*". Was "*Void lustre*" a difficult record to write?

Karl: Absolutely it was. I think the process of creating such a large record as "*Cloak of ash*" left us a little burnt out in the wake of writing and recording it. However, we then had to sit on it for quite some time after we'd finished in order to fit into Relapses release schedule. There's a finality to a record actually being released that allows you to move on from it, so we were caught in something of a holding pattern and while we were writing songs and riffs we hadn't yet identified a direction for the next record because we still felt we were in the "*Cloak of ash*" headspace.

On top of that if you throw busy personal lives and deteriorating mental health into the mix it is easy to see why the follow up took us so long.

HOPE DRONE – DRIVEN BY OPTIMISTIC NIHILISM

Hope Drone's musical recipe is one that blends elements from black metal, sludge and post-rock into a dynamic result. A combination I personally like very much, but also one that has been done many times by now. To be honest, there is hardly any difference in sound and approach when I compare "*Void lustre*" and its predecessor. Don't you think you will need to change your future approach in order to keep the music fresh?

Karl: I appreciate your honesty, but I can't say that I agree with your sentiment. While there might be a lot of bands who make music using some of the same basic elements as us, I don't really think that any of them are doing it quite the same way we are nor that there aren't any differences between "*Cloak of ash*" and "*Void lustre*". I will say that the differences are subtle; we're currently more interested in honing the finer details of our sound and in imbuing our influences beyond the genres people ascribe to our music when they write or talk about it.

We live in ephemeral times and I think in a world where we're constantly assailed by things which are trying to get our attention there is a forgotten value in slow-burn growth, craft and iteration. The stated purpose of Hope Drone has always been personal catharsis through music, as such drastically changing our sound up or being perceived as fresh isn't a key concern, if we are moved by it then we are moved by it.

Obviously human beings love novelty and we're not against changing things up either provided it serves the music. For the kind of music we want to create and emotions we're trying to express and evoke some elements of our sound and the way we approach it, such as certain recording practices are now core components of what Hope Drone is.

Is there a theme that binds the five songs on "*Void lustre*" together?

Chris (guitar, vocals): *Void Lustre* is about overcoming the existential despair that comes from confronting nothingness. The five songs trace a path from an awakening into a world without inherent meaning, to the depths of despair that such an awakening brings, to the realization that, in this vacuum, we can build meaning from within, forge a path and dictate our own meaning, and finally to the struggle to hold on to those things that bring meaning to our existence in the face of impermanence and the relentless passage of time. *Void Lustre* ultimately presses for an optimistic nihilism.

HOPE  DRONE

Atmospheric black metal often deals with the four natural elements (air, water, earth and fire) which are expressed through the genre's dynamic interplay and cinematographic approach. Many of your songs seem to deal with the element 'water'. What attracts you so much to it?

Karl: The kind of music we're trying to make lends itself to the elemental and water particularly as in both content and form our songs mirror it. The structure of the songs often ebbs and flows like the river might whether clear and pure or raging torrents and similarly the trance-like nature of some of the repetitive parts of songs lends itself the eternal lapping of waves on a shore. Lyrically we explore humanity and our place in time. Of all the elements water naturally lends itself to the idea of traversal of time, again through the flowing of a river, the erosion of a bank or the cyclical nature of rainfall.

HOPE DRONE – DRIVEN BY OPTIMISTIC NIHILISM

For “Cloak of ash” you worked with the renowned Relapse Records. For “Void lustre”, however, you returned to the smaller Moment Of Collapse Records that also released your self-titled EP. Why did the collaboration with Relapse Records end? Does it have something to do with this specific genre being over the top of its hype and that it’s no longer of any interest for a label like Relapse?

Karl: I think in many ways a lot of the questions you posed are more suited to be asked of Relapse than us, being from Australia trends and hype don’t really affect us as the underground is quite small it is near impossible to have an oversaturation of any particular kind of bands or sound. From our perspective, we are a very small band from a distant part of the world who had the opportunity to be on a label that once had some of our favourite bands on it. We’re grateful for having that experience. However, we did feel like a small fish in a big pond of established bands, even more so due to our geographical isolation.

Basti at Moment of Collapse on the other hand is someone we’ve spent time with, stayed with and connected with. For a band like Hope Drone, we’re more comfortable on a smaller label with a greater level of control over how we present our work. Ultimately we’ve never intended for Hope Drone to be a career, the band was started with us assuming we’d only ever be a local band playing to three people and everything beyond that has been a surprise.

Peege (bass): When we signed to Relapse we’d actually already essentially finished the recording part of “Cloak of ash” and funded the recording off of our own backs. As such, our original agreement with Relapse was simply licensing our record to them and retaining ownership of it and no commitment was made for multiple records. We did reach out to them with “Void lustre” but we didn’t come to an agreement. Moment of Collapse, however, have been with us for a very long time. Basti has supported us in many ways, even when we were considered a “Relapse artist”. He’s an exceptional person and someone I’m proud to call a friend, so it was very easy to go back and work with him.

To promote the previous record, you embarked on a European tour together with Downfall Of Gaia. I attended the gig in Utrecht and I remember it was bloody hot inside the venue with temperatures of more than 35°C degrees. Do you remember this show? Being from Australia, you probably are better used to extremely hot weather, not?

Karl: Personally, touring is less about promotion and more about having an experience and connecting with people and other cultures. Bigger bands tour to promote a record and make their living. For us, one of the perks of releasing a record is we have an excuse to maybe tour somewhere cool or go see our friends interstate. Of course, we do remember this show, it was a great one and we enjoyed our time in Utrecht. That whole tour it was pretty warm but as you say it wasn’t really anything new for us as we’re pretty used to warmer weather. We fare much worse in the cold however as generally Brisbane isn’t particularly cold.



HOPE DRONE – DRIVEN BY OPTIMISTIC NIHILISM

I remember having a small conversation with one of you guys outside the venue. You were telling that Holland was one of the most beautiful countries you had ever seen. You must have been drunk or stoned (or both), because I cannot image that the Netherlands can make such a big impression on someone who lives in Australia, haha?

Karl: The reality is that there are many beautiful places on this Earth, both natural and manmade. For us being from so-called Australia the kind of architecture you find in Europe with hundreds of years of history does not exist, nor do we have the same kinds of forests and mountains so for us it is beautiful and stunning. Obviously we also come from a place of great natural beauty that we don't take for granted which unfortunately is on the decline due to climate change and our government's complete disregard (if not active disdain) for the environment.

Are there plans to promote "Void lustre"? A European tour together with your country-mates Encircling Sea would be great!

Karl: We do intend to tour though currently we're not sure where we'll be going next. Obviously, we do want to come back to Europe, but we'd also love to go somewhere a little closer to home like Japan as well. Generally we prefer to tour with a band from the region we're going to since the tour starts out in the little less precarious of a financial position with less huge flights as well as the opportunity to make connections over the tour with people from a different culture and scene than us.



HOPE DRONE – DRIVEN BY OPTIMISTIC NIHILISM

Here in Belgium, we are spoiled in terms of concerts and festivals. If you want, you can go several times per week to underground or bigger gigs. How is this compared to Australia’s music scene? Are there a lot of gigs and festivals focusing on underground music?

Karl: In terms of underground music, most of Europe is absolutely spoiled compared to Australia. If you’re into the more underground end of the heavy music spectrum then you are definitely not facing an abundance of choice in terms of international shows to go to any given week. We don’t really have any major heavy music festivals anymore certainly nothing like Roadburn or Amplifest stacked with bands we like from all over the world. The closest thing we have is Dark Mofo in Tasmania which sometimes brings out underground bands that you never thought would be able to tour Australia but even then that is only a small portion of what that festival is.

It can be pretty hard to get people to come out for shows even in the capital cities sometimes and there isn’t a huge amount of venues in any given city and those that exist do so precariously.

The DIY warehouse type venues rarely last very long. There is very little support from the government for live music or nightlife in general really and if anything they act as an impediment to music most of the time.

That isn’t to say there aren’t great bands or good people working hard for music but there are definitely challenges.



© Hannah Roche

HOPE DRONE – DRIVEN BY OPTIMISTIC NIHILISM

Peege: Australia is a really difficult country for underground music. We're geographically the size of the USA but with only 26 million people. Public transport infrastructure is pretty poor compared to other similar nations, particularly outside of major cities. In order to make a tour work, you either need to fly between cities or spend 10+ hours driving, meaning we miss out on a lot of major bands. Neurosis, for example, only toured Australia for the first time a couple of years ago.

All that being said, it does make the times bands make an effort to come here very special because you know any underground band who does come will mostly likely only leave with their memories and a debt.

Finally, I was wondering if your band name was taken from the Godspeed You! Black Emperor song? The contrast of the word "hope" next to the word "drone" suggests an intentional contradiction to make a point. Heavy, despairing drones next to a word that implies optimism and faith that things will improve.

Karl: Yes, we didn't give it too much thought we just needed a name. I have no idea what Godspeed were going for when they used it but for us it was ambiguous and fit the mood for the music we were trying to create. Ultimately Hope Drone isn't really defined by the arrangement of words but rather what we've done under such a moniker.

This interview was published on Addergebroed on August 7, 2019