

SABATHAN – WANTS TO KEEP THE ANCIENT SPIRIT ALIVE

One of the most legendary figures of the Belgian Black Metal-scene is Lord Sabathan, mostly known for his time with Enthroned, one of the oldest Belgian Black Metal bands. Nowadays, he's busy as hell with Slaughter Messiah, Heinous and Sabathan, a project that resurrected the old-Enthroned stuff. Time for a chat with this living legend.(JOKKE)



Hail Sabathan! You have been quite busy the past few months due to recordings for a new Slaughter Messiah album among other things. What can we expect from this new release?

Expect just pure fuckin' Ancient Metal of Death! I think this is the album I am the most proud off since Enthroned's 1997 album "*Towards the skullthrone of Satan*". We are busy with the record since November 2018. Everything is done except the graphic material. We still have to finish some details, but this album - believe me - will surprise more than one. The title for our first full length album will be "*Cursed to the pyre*" and contains eight songs of pure aggression clocking in at around 45 minutes of music. The record will be released through High Roller Records in January 2020. We took our time but it's for giving the best.

After you quit Enthroned in 2006, you played in Black/Thrash Metal band Dawn Of Crucifixion, Heavy/Speed Metal outfit Horacle and Slaughter Messiah. How is playing in these smaller and more underground metal bands compared to Enthroned, who were already a well-established name in the Extreme Metal scene?

The popularity doesn't matter, the most important thing for me is playing from the heart and the soul and that my music has a soul. So many bands sound 'plastic' nowadays, heartless, soulless with over-the-top productions. This is not what I want to do. I want to keep the

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ancient spirit, the one who forged me into Metal is the most important thing, without it, I shouldn't play anymore. All my bands (Slaughter Messiah, Sabathan and Heinous) have now well established names in the underground and that's all I care about. Horacle split up in 2018 due to a lack of passion and devotion from the major part of the line-up. I can't stand playing with that kind of 'musicians'.

You are off course best known for being the vocalist and bass player for Enthroned, a band you started with Cernunnos (RIP) in 1993 and left before the release of "Tetra karcist". Although I have been following Enthroned since "Towards the skullthrone of Satan", I don't remember having read a statement or interview wherein you motivated the fact that you left the band YOU started. So are you willing to shed some light on this matter?

This is a story that many do not understand, but for me it's clear. Back in 2006, I had to face up many personal problems, things that I don't want to talk about here. I asked the guys of Enthroned to take a break for at least six months to get rid of the shit in my personal life. They refused my demand and from there started a lot of arguments between Nornagest and me. I was very fed up with this situation, being pushed down and disrespected, so I decided to give up. I wasn't in a state of mind to fight in order to keep the name. They also wanted to change the musical direction of the band, so I decided to go for other paths. Today I absolutely don't regret anything and I'm quite certain that I made the right choice.

The band indeed switched to a more orthodox. What is your opinion about this part of the Black Metal scene that has a more philosophical take on the genre and focusses a lot on imagery and symbolism?

They took this decision without consulting me, and that's also one of the reasons I quit. I don't like and never liked that kind of soulless stuff. Black Metal for me is in the first place a Rock 'n' Roll attitude, which is totally not the case in the orthodox shit. They did what they wanted to do and it wasn't my problem anymore. The past is the past. Today I play the old Enthroned material that still belongs to me under my name Sabathan and I play really the kind of stuff I always begged for in Slaughter Messiah and Heinous together with a perfect team of Rockers.



SHOOTING METALHEAD

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In 2018, you decided to take the old Enthroned stuff from the first two albums and the “*Regie sathanas*” EP back to the stage by performing under your moniker Sabathan. What led to this decision to start Sabathan?

For a long time I had been thinking about this project, because the old Enthroned material is a big part of my life and my soul. Around 2016, one of my best friends from France (Alexis Monin) motivated me to do it, but I already had Slaughter Messiah going on for a while because I joined them back in January 2011. The idea became more specific after David & Christine from No Compromise Metal Fest proposed me to headline the edition of 2017 with this project. In the meantime, I had to celebrate the 20 years anniversary of “*Towards the Skullthrone of Satan*” as well as the tragic death of Cernunnos, the one who formed Enthroned with me back in 1993. I got so many encouragements from all my friends to do it, they were pushing me to reach my goals. I recruited the old Enthroned line-up featuring Ngvaroth as guitarist (Enthroned member between 2004 and 2008) and drummer Ahephaïm (Enthroned member between 2007 and 2009). Since I was missing another guitar player, I asked my comrade Thomas Exhumator from Slaughter Messiah. All of them accepted my offer and then we started to rehearse for the first live appearance that was No Compromise fest on September 23, 2017. It’s there that this new adventure started, a real “back from the grave” thing for me. Everytime I play these songs, I feel a fire burning in me, something eternal, something I can’t explain...I’ll continue to play and to love these songs until the end of my life.



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Did you never consider asking the old members Tsebaoth, Namroth Blackthorn and Nebiros since you only play the old-Enthroned stuff from the time they were in the band?

No because they mostly left the Metal scene and changed completely their musical direction and mindset. Tsebaoth is still a good friend, but he's now into brutal Death/Grind, but it's not impossible that he will come back to play a couple of songs when we will make the 25 years anniversary of "*Prophecies of pagan fire*" in 2020 at Metal Méan (single and unique date for 2020 in Belgium). I don't know in which band Nebiros currently plays, but he's lost his interest in Black Metal since many years. I don't have a clue what became of Namroth Blackthorn, I haven't seen him since more than ten years, he used to be the very first Horacle drummer but quit after a few months of rehearsing. He's no longer in the scene anywhere, anymore.



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What I like about Sabathan, is that you focus on the old material which makes me very nostalgic about the days I started discovering the black metal genre whereas most older bands mainly focus on playing their more recent stuff. Are you a nostalgic soul?

I'm a nostalgic soul for sure. Why? Because Metal music was way better back in the 70's with Hard Rock, the 80's with Heavy, Speed and Thrash Metal and the 90's with Death and Black Metal. My soul has been forged in the Heavy Metal music from the early 80's and this is something that has been running in my blood ever since, 'til the marrow of my bones. I still follow the scene in every genre (of what I consider good and true of course), there are still plenty of killer bands nowadays but mostly the ones who play the old genres.

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What do you consider the most exciting musical period in your life and what is your best Enthroned related memory?

My most exciting musical period was of course the 80's....no doubt about that. My best related Enthroned memory was when Metalysee Agency proposed us to tour with Ancient Rites, Bewitched and Sacramentum back in June 1996. It was the very first tour in my life as a musician longing to conquer the world and this is something you will never forget. It is burnt in my soul forever since.

Both “*Prophecies of pagan fire*” and “*Towards the skullthrone of Satan*” have been rereleased on vinyl by Painkiller Records in 2006 whereas the latter one has also been rereleased by Back On Black in 2014. Is there a new LP reissue planned for “*Prophecies of pagan fire*”?

I have no idea, you have to ask this question to Nornagest as I don't have any input on Enthroned material re-releases. I just have the rights to play the old material...nothing more.

You have a very specific and unique style of screaming with a high pitch that seems to be a love it or hate it thing. Do you have a special technique or do you have to train your voice before recordings or a tour to make sure you don't have a sore throat or vocal problems?

Well, the story I'm going to explain you here might seem difficult to believe but is true. Back in 1986 when I discovered “*The return*” from Bathory, I was blown away by Quorthon's voice and I really wanted to sing like that. One year later, I was in Morbid Death (my very first band featuring Cernunnos among others) with Cernunnos as the singer. When we discovered “*Under the sign of the black mark*”, the third Bathory opus, I seriously started training my vocals with this album. I was 17 years old at that time, I was a crazy maniac totally possessed by all forms of Extreme Metal (at that time Bathory, Slayer, Venom, Mayhem, Morbid Angel, Possessed, Death, Dark Angel, Destruction, Sodom, Kreator and many others...), but Quorthon's voice, as well as King Diamond's voice, sent

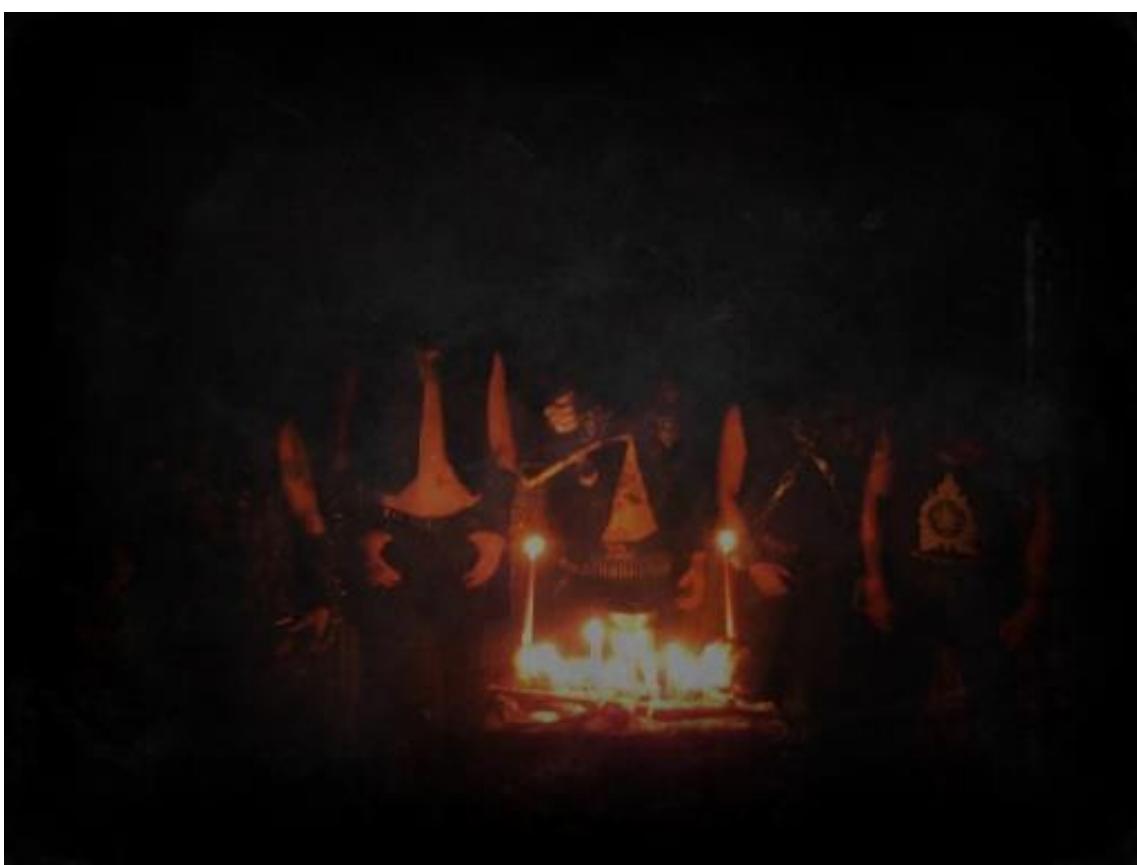


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me shivers down my spine. Every time I listened their records, I was immersed. One day in the middle of the night, I decided to go in the woods with my Walkman and a tape of "*Under the sign of the black mark*". I had learned the lyrics from "*Call from the Grave*", "*13 candles*", "*Enter the eternal fire*" and "*Massacre*", so I went into the woods because I wanted to have this same effect of delay/reverb as Quorthon had on this recording. I started screaming and yelling the lyrics alone in the dark with a torch and my Walkman headphones on my head. I used to do this twice a week. Once a guy passed nearby the woods while taking a walk with his dog while I was doing this. He heard me and was scared to death and called the police. When I saw the blue lights far away, I hid myself in a little cave in the woods. They never found me but I was scared to death too hahahahaha. This is how I started. Later on, I had my rehearsal room and continued training with real vocal equipment and a real reverb/delay rack.

I saw Sabathan performing on 2018's Throne Fest, this years A Thousand Lost Civilizations fest and recently also during the Ancient Rites gig. Can we expect more shows in the near future?

We receive plenty of demands, but we don't want to play more than once per year in Belgium. The show in Brussels was the first and the two dates with Ancient Rites were sold out but it were the last shows in Belgium for 2019. In 2020 we are already confirmed for Metal Méan festival (the last edition). This will be the single Belgian show for 2020 and it will be something special for the 25 years anniversary of the "*Prophecies of pagan fire*" album.



Heinous

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Will Sabathan only focus on performing Enthroned classics or is it possible that one day you will release a new album in the vein of the old Enthroned stuff?

Of course, I would like to release an album totally in the vein of classic Enthroned but we still didn't start working on it. I'm first focusing on my other projects Slaughter Messiah and Heinous.

I saw Heinous perform in Amstelveen during the Black Cilice gig and was really surprised by the energy you unleashed on stage. What can you tell us about this band?

Heinous started in February 2018, I'm just the bass player. We already released a 4 tracks demo on tape and 10 inch EP through New Era Productions and a 7 inch EP "*Lucifer vult*" was released in 2019 by New Era again. We played one gig at Forest Fest in Switzerland in July 2019 and our second show was the one you mentioned as support for Black Cilice. A Heinous album will be recorded in 2020.



Slaughter Messiah

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Belgium's extreme underground scene is very fertile at the moment with on the one side a lot of great new bands such as Dikasterion, Moenen Of Xezbeth and Perverted Ceremony and on the other side a lot of resurrected bands like Paragon Impure, Gotmoor, Thronum Vrondor and Kludde. Do you follow our Belgian scene and which bands can you recommend?

Of course, I've always been proud of our scene, and I can recommend you Possession, Saqra's Cult, Terrifiant, which is the best Heavy/Speed Metal band Belgium has had since Acid (RIP 1986) but also Violent Sin, Bütcher, Gae Bolga, Ars Veneficum, Carnation, Evil Invaders, Solfatare, Tyrant's Kall, Catharall, Flatched Creed, ...and many others. The list is long. There always has been a huge amount of good bands in Belgium it's just that the international Metal media do not care about our scene. It's a pity because we could be a good competitor for strong scenes like Sweden or Germany. We're a way smaller country but look at all the quality bands we have!!!



Enthroned probably was the most important band for the Belgian Black Metal scene, although I sometimes have the feeling that the band was more popular outside of Belgium, especially in Latin-America. Are you proud of what you achieved with Enthroned?

Absolutely, I've been out of the band since October 2006, but I'm proud to have been a part during 13 years since the very beginning of Enthroned. I gave all the best I had in me for this band. It has been a long battle, we didn't have the facilities the other bands had back in the days because we came from Belgium. We didn't have the advantages that Norwegian and Swedish bands had, but we never surrendered, and I think that believing in what you do and go on ahead fighting for what you love with deep convictions, is the key to success. Now I'm back with the Sabathan project that is the continuity of my Enthroned epoch and I'll keep the flame burning like in the old days. The mentality has changed a lot nowadays but I'll keep it the way I created it, without following any trends. The same goes for Slaughter Messiah.

Thanks for the interview and good luck with all your bands and projects!

Thanks for your support Johan. All hails to Flanders and to all true Metal warriors out there. Keep the black flame burning...666!

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