

## BALMOG – WE DON'T PUT LIMITS ON OUR CREATIVE VISION

After 3 pure Black/Death Metal albums, Spanish band Balmog, from the valley of Soutomaoir, enrich their sound on *"EVE"* and create a vast manifestation of extreme metal music. This new step forward, after the release of last year's critically acclaimed *"Pillars of Salt"* EP, continues to advance Balmog's personal approach. Black/Death Metal, Post-Punk, Traditional Metal, Psych-Rock... it's everything and nothing at the same time. We discussed their new record with vocalist/guitarist Balc. (JOKKE)



In 2020, you released the splendid *"Pillars of Salt"* EP, on which you showcased a wider spectrum of musical influences with elements taken from genres as Dark Rock, Psych-/Prog-Rock, Goth-Rock, Post-Punk and traditional Heavy Metal. At first, I thought this would be a one-off experiment, but it seems that this release was some kind of a 'new start', since the new full-length *"EVE"* continues with the same kind of influences. Was the EP some kind of trial to see how this new approach would work before starting to work on a next full-length?

Well, the songwriting of *"EVE"* began a little earlier than for *"Pillars of Salt"*, something that few people know. If I remember correctly, we had *"Senreira"*, *"Desacougo"*, and some ideas for *"Birth of Feral"* and *"Slander"*. Those songs already made the way forward quite clear, with many new elements, but to be honest: it would be the rest of the tracks on *"EVE"* that mark this more experimental character. Therefore, when we started writing *"Pillars of Salt"*, we already had about 50% of the album finished, but it got halted a bit as soon as we started sculpting the project that would end up being called *"Pillars of Salt"*. The truth is that to some extent, you are not wrong in that the EP was partly an experiment: a single track, 18 minutes long, a lot of musical experimentation... It was a real challenge that could have been a real disaster, a waste of time, money, and a lot of effort, but *"Pillars of Salt"* turned out incredibly well. That did empower us, in the sense that we gained confidence in ourselves in the idea that we could do something new and risky, while still having a good result. *"Pillars of Salt"* is not the starting point, but we could say that it is the gasoline that helped make *"EVE"*'s fire more intense. In part, they share something in common: that intention to innovate, to not set limits and to walk the path that we want to; but there are also points where they differ clearly. *"Pillars of Salt"* was intended to be epic, while *"EVE"* wants to delve into something much darker and claustrophobic. Anyway, I think that *"EVE"*, even being a work with a more open vision, makes 'sense' within our trajectory. Probably, if someone listens to our first album and then *"EVE"*, they will not find that connection point, but if you follow our works chronologically, it's easy to find a link between our latest works. Somehow, although *"EVE"* may be partly a surprise, I sincerely believe that it could have been predictable.

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You used to state on older releases that Balmog's Black Metal was created under the principles of fundamentalism and devotion. Has your opinion regarding the writing of music changed throughout the years?

I honestly believe that the principles are the same. It's the same snake with different skin, but it's still poisonous and effective. We remain true to those ideas, lyrically there is continuity (adding certain new elements) and musically, although there are obvious differences, we firmly believe that we remain a Black Metal band in spirit and attitude. I know it may seem curious, and probably some people don't understand it like that, but it's how we feel. Answering your question: yes, we consider that the way to approach Black Metal is different, but we still consider Balmog a Black Metal band. When Mayhem released *"De Mysteriis Dom Sathanas"* it was considered an innovative album within the Black Metal scene, when Deathspell Omega started with their new vision the same thing happened... I know it's controversial, but we see it that way. Are Ved Buens Ende or Wagner Ödegård Black Metal bands? I feel that when I listen to them, although I know that musically, especially with the *"Written in Waters"* album, they can be far from Black Metal standards. Over time we have been changing that skin and it will probably continue in the future, but I assure you that the spirit will remain the same. In fact, being honest, we consider *"EVE"* the most authentic album, pure and made from the guts.



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**Can you understand that some people want to see Black Metal as pure and traditional as possible without any form of evolution or progression?**

Absolutely!! I do it too, I listen to Black Metal in its most primitive state, and I play in bands that are very basic and confined within the parameters of Black Metal. I started with a new project called Third Nail, and it can be defined as pure Black Metal. I like whiskey on its own, but I also like to mix it with other things... it's a bit of the same concept. I understand that there are people who continue to think like 20/25 years ago, when Black Metal had to be pure and untouchable. I was profoundly intransigent at that time, but today I believe that there are things, from King Crimson or Pink Floyd, that offer me the same darkness and a sense of desolation as Mayhem, and we think that it was interesting to include it in Balmog since it's music that we have been listening to almost since we were children. In part, I would say that it could be considered a 'regression'.



*(c) Krimhild Castle*

**How far do you think you can stretch your sound with these new influences? Will Balmog always remain a Black/Death metal band in its core, or do you see the band evolve further and further away from extreme Metal?**

As I was saying, we continue with the idea that we are a Black Metal band. The essence of Balmog, the musical, aesthetic, and conceptual sides, are still the same. On the other hand, it's clear that we have opened doors and that means that the sound has changed and mutated into something new. To this day, we don't intend to put musical limits on the band, we just let it flow, but that idea of keeping a grounded backbone in Black/Death Metal is essential and that is not going to change.

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We don't know what the new Balmog material will be like. We've started composing new stuff, but it's hard to say how it will finally sound, yet it's still going to sound like Balmog for sure, because it has the heart set on extreme Metal. Balmog's plan right now is to have no plans, we're at a point where we don't care what people think, we don't put limits on our creative vision and that's amazing. Honestly, it's the best moment for Balmog from all points of view, and that's going to lead to some very interesting new things, but we can remain faithful to certain principles that make Balmog an already identifiable band.

**Did you discover genres as Goth-Rock, Post-Punk and Prog-Rock rather recently, or have you been listening to them for many years? What bands are some of your favourites and which can you recommend as a starting point for fans of Balmog who are not necessarily familiar with these genres?**

No, some Fields of the Nephilim records I have at home are from the mid-nineties. So no, I would rather say that it is the opposite. I think *"EVE"* has helped us reconnect with the music we have listened to since we were teenagers or even since we were children. Luckily, I am not able to remember when I first listened to Pink Floyd, since I was a child and my parents listened to that music. I will not deny that there have been times when I left a lot of that music, especially in my most Black Metal era, in which I fled from everything that had the word "Goth".



With this album we intend to delve into the darkest part of rock, but in a visceral, carnal and violent sense, not in the 'romantic' and nostalgic sense that there could have been in the nineties and from which many of us flee so much. I don't know, it isn't easy to explain, but basically *"EVE"* aims to convey a claustrophobic atmosphere, of horror understood as violence and the ability to do real harm to other people, not as something sweet and sentimental. In *"EVE"*, there is something of King Crimson, something of Sisters of Mercy, Fields of the Nephilim or even Joy Division. I suppose those are good starting points, but I also don't want to give lessons to anyone, I just think that violence and darkness can be found in many styles beyond Mayhem or Morbid Angel, without of course giving up on these bands. I think that an album that is also a reference for us is *"Sister"* by In Solitude, probably one of the best Dark Rock albums released in the last 30 years.

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**On “EVE”, you often use your clean singing voice. Did you have to train your voice to use it in this way? Have you always known that you also have a good clean singing voice, or did you need some push from the other band members to develop these skills?**

Actually, it was all quite spontaneous. That is to say, we were always incorporating that type of cleaner vocals one step at a time. On our previous albums, you could already hear some clean voices, but we believed that for this album it was necessary to enhance it, since the songs had a feeling closer to these vocals. To a certain extent, it were the songs that determined the vocals, not the other way around. I mean, there was no prior vision of "we are going to include more clean voices." Step by step, we were adding new registers, we saw that they worked, and we continued walking along that path. They are quite natural for my voice, so it was not a great effort. Maybe in the future, I'll try to look for something more complex or just sing in a more raw way... who knows!



*(c) Gema Von Tildod*

The rest of the band has always encouraged me to experiment and look for new things. There were some ideas that did not work and were discarded, but in general it was a comfortable and natural process. Without a doubt, I think this is one of the elements that clearly marks a new dimension in Balmog, but we have also tried to find a point of balance with other dirtier voices that we believe is important to maintain. In fact, those vocals that we can call Black Metal, now have a much more dramatic and dynamic character that I think also make them very interesting in contrast to the rest. I honestly think that the voices make “EVE” a more original album that can differentiate us from other bands, although I repeat that it was not premeditated.

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The lyrics on “EVE” contain – as usual – a religious and philosophic introspection and seem to deal with topics such as suffering and human terror. Can you elaborate a little bit more on the themes covered?

“EVE” is about the ability to create horror from human beings in opposition to the divinity, as an element of confrontation and rebellion against creation. “EVE” continues to consolidate the idea, which we have already used on previous albums, of the existence of an entity opposed to the divinity of which the human being is also a part. With this album in particular, we try to focus on that creation of violence and human horror and the feelings it can arouse. The album begins with “*Horror in Circuitu*”, a song wherein we try to open that door to terror, later embodied by the birth of the savage or “*Birth of Feral*”. Throughout the album, we try to recreate those feelings through images and obviously the oppressive tone of the songs. There are references to texts such as “*Genesis*” or the very fall of the divinity incarnate in human form, as in “*Agnus Dei*” or “*Carrion Heart*”. The intention is to try to create a feeling of unease in the listener that leads to a certain sense of heaviness.

Some lyrics are based on works from Portuguese writer and poet Fernando Pessoa. Which of his works formed a source of inspiration and which of his writings can you recommend?

I am fortunate to be able to understand Portuguese, and Pessoa is a writer I started reading when I was a teenager because he's usually named here in schools, I guess due to geographical proximity, so my contact with his work was relatively early. From Pessoa we took his existentialist vision in which he creates a feeling of vital emptiness, the banality of human existence and the feeling of orphanage in the face of creation. That pessimism and its acceptance as one more element of the human being seemed interesting to us. What we are trying to do with “EVE” is to represent that feeling of existential voidness that Pessoa expresses in much of his work, rather than a deep reflection on his writings. It's like a varnish with which we surround the concept of the album. Pessoa wrote under various heteronyms, something similar to the concept of a doppelgänger. I would recommend “*The Book of Disquiet*”, “*Message*” or “*Sheep's Vigil*”, and his poetic work is fascinating as well. I think it also helps to understand a certain essence of the Portuguese people.



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Another writer that influenced you is the lesser known Galician Xose Maria Diaz Castro and his theosophical poetry. What do you like about his work and what are some lessons you learned or insights you earned after having read some of his work?

In the case of Díaz Castro, we used fragments of his poetic work, specifically a book called *"Nimbos"*, where he reflects on the idea of human being as an extension of the divine. We use his poems, turning them around and manipulating them to fit the concept of the album that I was commenting on before, that is, understanding the human being as a living being in rebellion against creation.

What's the story behind the intriguing artwork?



There are two parts that I think can be differentiated. On the one hand we have the cover, made by Branca Studio. The goal was to find something basic and somewhat controversial and shocking. Until now, we have always used covers that fit the canon of Black Metal, but for this album we looked for something different, we wanted to break a bit with the previous aesthetic and even, why not say it, look for a certain controversy within the scene. We know that a lot of people are not going to like this cover as it moves away from those canons, but it's something pre-meditated. We honestly think it's an iconic and shocking cover, but it's clear that not everyone is

going to accept it. Conceptually, it is based on a story by a Galician author named Castelao, about a skeleton that can see through a glass eye once dead. That bridge between death and human horror through this element seemed very interesting to us as a cover. Somehow, that eye is about to witness all the terror that is to come on the album.

In addition to the cover, there are several collages and pictures inside the album that try to represent different ideas behind the main concept. The curious thing is that for this, we have used very close cultural and geographical elements, using above all images of Galicia and its culture, such as furze, images of ancient rites that existed until recently in our rural zones and some old photographs of our landscapes. The idea was to transmute certain iconic elements of the Bible such as bramble into closer elements such as the Atlantic furze. I really recommend taking a look at the album's artwork, it's really deep and special.

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**Black Seed Productions made some diehard versions of some of your releases. What was included in these special limited versions?**

All those editions have something made with our own hands. In all of them you can find our own blood that we extract from our bodies and also use in live shows. For our previous album, "*Vacvum*", an envelope was included in which there was soil taken from the cemetery of our village, specifically from the area where people who committed suicide and atheists are buried. There were also human bone fragments and worms.

With "*EVE*", we have included our blood again and also a demo that we used as a pre-production of the album. It was recorded in July of last year in our rehearsal room, shortly before we entered the studio, and it includes somewhat different and rawer versions of most of the songs of the album. We find it nice to always include those more limited versions that have somehow passed through our hands. It's a lot of work, but we think it's interesting.



**Balmog is one of the exceptions in the extreme metal scene in terms of a steady line-up. The core consisting of you and drummer Virus and bass player Morg has been there since the inception of the band in 2003. What makes the bond between all members so strong?**

I have no idea. I think it may be that we have always reached agreements on which direction to take. It's clear that we have different visions on a musical level, but we have managed to find meeting points and made progress. To be honest, we have never forced the situation, that is, I do not remember a moment when any of us felt out of place or wanted to leave the band.

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Besides a creative question, which I guess is the main element, it's clear that Balmog has united us in a certain way and has become a meeting point rather than a point of tension, which happens in many bands. We have been friends for years, so that also helped. I think the first Death Metal show I saw in my life, was one in which Unhallowed played, a Death Metal band where Morg played in the early nineties, haha. I think that in more than one moment they have been parents to me, since I am the youngest and I have some tendency of looking for troubles.

**Producer Javi Bastard, whom you also worked with on previous albums, is now a permanent member of the band too. Was it absolutely necessary to add a second guitar player to the band with the new sound in mind?**

Well, he had already been playing with Balmog live for a few years, in fact he did it when we started to play "Vacvum" on stage. The truth is that Balmog's melodies, from the first album on, have been designed for two guitars, but until then the trio worked well. I don't know, the feeling that a trio transmits has always seemed brutal to me, it gives a more violent and in your face feeling, just think of Motörhead, Sodom or Thin Lizzy... However, it's clear that two guitars give bigger density, power and depth, so to have two guitars on stage seemed like a fundamental step for us. It was a decision made long ago. We had worked with Javi at Moontower Studios, he's a great friend of ours and has shown his great solvency in bands like Graveyard, Teitanblood or Apologoethia, so we thought it would be great to play with him. We believe that we haven't been wrong. It was one of the best decisions made in recent years.



**Spain's heritage in terms of Black Metal is rather limited compared to other Mediterranean countries such as Portugal and especially Greece. Do you have an explanation why this is the case?**

Damn, we often talk about that... I think it's not easy to find an explanation. Maybe it has something to do with the fact that the country was very closed in itself until the 80s/90s, you must keep in mind that there was a dictatorship until almost 1980, but I guess it will be a mixture of many factors, including the economic one, the lack of contact with other scenes, the little knowledge of the English language... In the 80s, there were good Heavy Metal bands (Barón Rojo, Ángeles del Infierno, Muro, Sobredosis...), in the 90s there were cool Death Metal bands but at a very underground level, but Black Metal beyond Primigenium was practically non-existent in the 90s. I sincerely believe that the great change occurred 10 to 15 years ago, when the number of bands, but above all the quality, has even made the scene stand out at some point, you just have to think of Proclamation, Teitanblood, Graveyard or 13th Moon, bands with enormous reputations.

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There is certainly no comparison with the Portuguese and Greek scenes of the past, they have always been much more powerful. Nowadays, I do think that we can be compared in terms of bands with other places in Europe, but it's clear that a tradition helps. In the case of Portugal, a small country with certain shortcomings, it has always stood out in terms of festivals, underground activity, or surprising with very interesting proposals. I think that right now the Portuguese raw black metal scene and festivals, such as Invicta Requiem Mass, Extreme Metal Attack or Steel Warriors Rebellion, are very noteworthy. We are very close to Portugal, in fact we usually play two or three times a year in that country, so we have always felt very connected to that scene, and they have always received us in a fantastic way, so somehow we also feel as a part of it. We are lucky that we also understand and speak some Portuguese, so it's great.



**If I'm not mistaken, Balmog has never played on Belgian soil so far. Are there plans to come over to the Benelux for a gig?**

Yes of course! We have a very good relationship with people from Belgium, in fact right now I'm doing something with Dorl Mathos from Heinous and Slaughter Messiah, and we usually meet people from Possession... I'm sure we'll visit Belgium, we never played there as you say, so we will fix it as soon as we can!

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