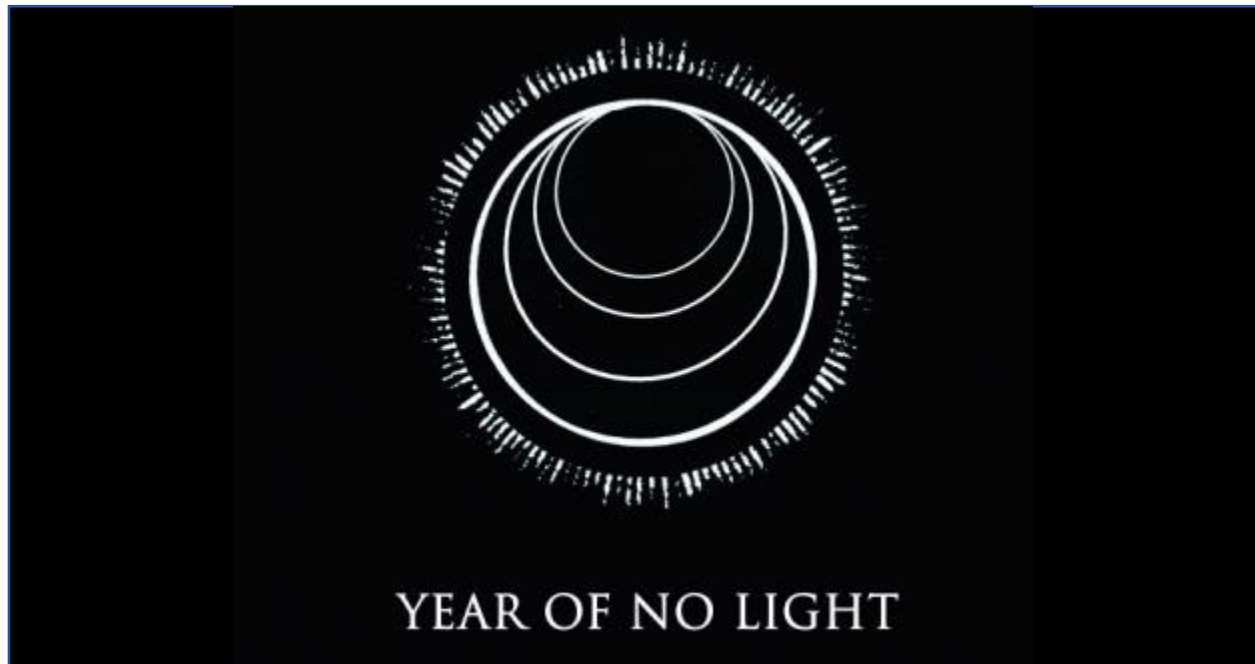


# YEAR OF NO LIGHT – LIVING IN THE DARK THROUGH ART IS A PRETTY HEALTHY WAY TO DEAL WITH THIS HARSH WORLD

The Bordeaux based six-piece Year Of No Light is celebrating its 20th anniversary as a band this year. On their 2006 debut album *"Nord"*, the Frenchmen combined a dark and aggressive Sludge Metal sound with psychedelic atmospheres inspired by Post-Rock and Shoegaze. In 2008, they underwent a significant line-up change, replacing their vocalist by a third guitarist and a second drummer to become an instrumental sextet. Thereafter, Year of No Light integrated Black Metal, Doom Metal, Drone and Dark Ambient influences on the albums *"Ausserwelt"* (2010), *"Tocsin"* (2013), the soundtrack record *"Vampyr"* (2013) and their amazing new record *"Consolamentum"*, that finally saw the light of day after eight long years. We spoke with guitarist Jerome about 2 decades of Year Of No Light. (JOKKE)



First of all congratulations with your celebration of 20 years Year Of No Light. It's been quite the ride, I guess?

Hell yeah!!!!

**What are the biggest differences between Year Of No Light as a beginning band and the nowadays collective with 5 albums under its belt?**

The most notable difference is the change of line-up. I think that we are also generally more mature musicians.

**Have you seen the music industry develop in a positive or negative way during all these years?**

It is both negative and positive. It's negative because record sales have collapsed, and artists are increasingly precarious. Likewise, many streaming sites have small remuneration paid to artists, which is shameful. On the other hand, it's positive because people have easy access to music, which is very important for underground artists.

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To celebrate your 20th anniversary as a band, Pelagic Records will be releasing not only your new album *"Consolamentum"*, but also *"Mnemophobia"*, a wooden box set containing your entire discography of 5 studio albums, several split EPs and the collaboration with Belgian composer Dirk Serries from the *"Live at Roadburn"* recordings, on 12 vinyl records. You must be very proud when holding the box set in your hands as it is a testimony of all the hard work you delivered in these 2 decades, no? What achievement(s) are you most proud of?

To exist for so long, to keep the faith in our music and to see that many people continue to support us is in itself something very rewarding. We are very happy with the work done around this discography, but we avoid being too nostalgic. We focus on the future of the band since we ended up releasing a record eight years after the last one and we have a lot of new songs that we can't wait to share with people.

The career-spanning box set was aptly titled *"Mnemophobia"*, which is an irrational and excessive fear of memories. People suffering mnemophobia may fear having memories in general, or they may specifically fear certain bad memories. Others with mnemophobia may fear losing their memories, and this type of phobia is believed to be common in Alzheimer's disease patients and those at high risk for Alzheimer's disease. A disease I'm unfortunately familiar with, since a good friend of mine died because of it at the age of 42. Are you afraid of losing memories? Are you nostalgic souls?



Losing memory is certainly one of the most frightening and dangerous situations in which a person or a society can find itself. Without memory there is no culture, we are fan of history of art and mankind but we are not nostalgic souls, we have to focus on future.

**Music is often related to specific (good or bad) memories of the past. Is there a record or song that you used to love, but cannot stand or hear anymore due to a bad connotation?**

Yes of course. Listening to old songs from Sparklehorse or Codeine makes me feel depressed, although I love these two bands.

**I have seen Year Of No Light perform live multiple times around the release of 2010's *"Ausserwelt"* record, and I have the impression that during these tours, Year Of No Light was quickly gaining attention from a larger crowd. What has been the most important record in your career in terms of pushing the band to the next level?**

I think it's *"Ausserwelt"*. With the departure of the singer, we did not know if the group could really continue, but when we decided to expand the line-up and offer more orchestral music, to carry this record at arm's length and give it a special identity, but we did not yet know that this album would really be a rebirth and that it would give us access to a new audience.

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I guess festivals like Roadburn, Dunk! Festival and Hellfest must also have been important throughout your musical career, although it's not always easy for an instrumental band focussing on atmosphere to really capture the moment on festivals compared to smaller gigs. What type of concert or setting do you find ideal for a band as YONL, and what have been some of the most amazing settings you have ever played in?

We really like all kinds of concert venues. We played in arts centres, fortresses in Romania, old churches in England. I have a lot of excellent memories of concerts, I am thinking in particular of the two concerts we did at St Vitus in New York, a great place run by incredible people. I don't think I have a real preference: no matter the place, as

long as the concert goes well. For example, I have very good memories of the last concert we gave at Magasin 4 in Brussels before the Covid crisis.

**When preparing for this interview, I noticed that every full-length has been released by another label. Was it a deliberate decision to never commit the band to a record label for more than one full-length release?**

Many of the labels that supported us simply disappeared during the record crisis. I am thinking of Crucial Blast or Conspiracy Records. We really enjoyed working with the different labels that released our records. From Music Fear Satan to Debemur Morti, it has always been a pleasure. Yet, the story of the band means that we have always worked with different labels according to the opportunities and our capacities of making new albums and touring.

**For “*Consolamentum*”, you teamed up with Pelagic records. How did this collaboration start?**

They offered us to release a record and, as we know, it's a label managed by musicians, so we knew we could engage with confidence.

**Five full-lengths might not seem a lot for a band with 20 years of activity, but you also released many split-recordings. Is this a format that you will continue to use in the future, or will you rather be focussing on full-length recordings from now on?**

One of the problems that we encountered with the splits is not having enough songs to regularly release albums. Therefore, I think that we cannot do some in the future, even if it is a format which allows to experiment with new things. We often have a lot of methodological problems when composing, which make the process very long, but if we resolve these problems and manage to produce a lot of songs, then maybe there will be new splits. For now, we are concentrating on the next record since “*Consolamentum*” has already been recorded two years ago.

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There lies an eight-year gap between 2013's *"Tocsin"* and *"Consolamentum"*, which is quite long. The song *"Réalgar"* was first released in 2019, so it gives the impression that the new record was planned to be released much sooner. Was *"Consolamentum"* a difficult record to make?

Yes, we struggled to finish a lot of songs. We threw a lot of them away, and we had trouble seeing each other to practice. Without accounting for the problems everyday life poses, the release was also postponed with 1 year due to Covid. *"Réalgar"* was released in April 2021, I don't believe it was available before.



Ever since the beginning of your career, you have had an obsession for the fall of man and salvation through darkness. The term *"consolamentum"* describes the sacrament, the initiation ritual in Catharism, which thrived in Southern Europe in the 12th - 14th century – a ritual that brought eternal austerity and immersion in the Holy Spirit. How is the album title related to the song titles and the artwork?

When we finish a record, there is always a moment when we have to find names for the songs, for the record and to find consistency with the artwork. At this moment, we let ourselves be guided by the music and we try to find a theme that we develop with abstract or very literary elements. The music always comes first, and the concepts are revealed as they go. I like the idea that people can take it all and go on their own journey. I wouldn't say more, but indeed, the overall purpose of the group revolves around this idea of salvation in the dark. I think living in the dark, through art, is a pretty healthy way to deal with this harsh world.

There seems to be a thread running through all of your albums: an exploration of the sensitive world that obeys a certain telos. Can you elaborate a little bit more on this? What's Year Of No Light's telos or ultimate aim?

I think each member of the group could have their own answer. For me it's about making powerful, sonic, hypnotic and dense music. An art form you can get lost in. Something that transcends and challenges me with sound. The world is something beautiful and scary, and for me this music is the medium to find meaning in it.

One of the songs is entitled *"Alétheia"*, meaning truth or disclosure in philosophy. It was used in Ancient Greek philosophy and revived in the 20th century by Martin Heidegger, who wrote several (quite complicated, I must say) essays about it, studying if aletheia equals truth or not. His essay entitled *"The Origin of the Work of Art"* describes the value of the work of art as a means to open a "clearing" for the appearance of things in the world, or to disclose their meaning for human beings. Heidegger explains the essence of art in terms of the concepts of being and truth. He argues that "art is not only a way of expressing the element of truth in a culture, but the means of creating it and providing a springboard from which "that which is" can be revealed. Works of art are not merely representations of the way things are, but actually produce a community's shared understanding." Do you agree with this? Do you consider your music as a work of art? What lies at the origin of Year Of No Light's music?

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Yes, I think Year Of No Light is an art form. Moreover, I think that art is a thing that at the same time is very simple, incredibly complex and specific to humanity. It is a means that we have found to make death acceptable, to have fun, to deal with emptiness and to create a link across generations.



*(c) Nicolas Alban*

Heidegger uses the example of a Greek temple to illustrate his conception of world and earth. “Such works as the temple help in capturing this essence of art as they go through a transition from artworks to art objects, depending on the status of their world. Once the culture has changed, the temple no longer is able to actively engage with its surroundings and becomes passive—an art object. He holds that a working artwork is crucial to a community and so must be able to be understood. Yet, as soon as meaning is pinned down and the work no longer offers resistance to rationalization, the engagement is over and it is no longer active.” Instrumental music is open for interpretation. The world it opens up for me doesn’t necessarily have to be the same as for other listeners. Do you think that in 100 years from now, Year Of No Light’s music will be interpreted differently as it is now?

I don't know if Year Of No Light's music will still be heard 100 years from now, but if it is, it will certainly be felt through the experience of people of the next generation. When you practice an artistic discipline as abstract as music, you have to expect and want people to take it over. That people can take their own journey and find meaning and something positive in it is a great achievement for a musician. It would be great if in 100 years, people would still find meaning in our music.



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*(c) Nicolas Alban*

The beauty of music is that it can be interpreted in many ways. Some seasoned composers are more adept at controlling or steering the listener as to what to feel. However, the listener will 'color' the music into something he can (or cannot) relate to. Someone might write something trying to emote loneliness. A listener might get dissatisfaction, emptiness, meaninglessness, hopelessness, or even think it's implying an actual physical event took place. Do you agree with the statement that we live in a post-modern society where composer intent is just as important as the interpretation?

Yes, I think so but I think it has always been like this.

The pinnacle of composing is when someone can directly steer the listener as to what to feel. Do you agree? Is this what you want to do with Year Of No Light's music, or do you rather want to keep the music open for interpretation? Maybe an interesting point is that the music can sound the same, but you experience it in a different way each and every time.

One of the things that I particularly like about music is the timing, the interpretation and the listening experience. It's a changing process, very cerebral and very physical. Sometimes with music, I have the impression of dancing like an architect who has orgasms. So yes, the richer and more open the musical experience, the more interesting it is, whether as a listener or as musicians. That's why I really like contemporary orchestral music, from Kaija Saariaho to Georg Friedrich Haas, but I also like Jeff Mills.

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Maybe the perfect music would be a mixture of trance and architecture while having orgasms in slow motion.

**Final philosophical question: Can music express that which words can't?**

No doubt, and I think that each artistic discipline produces its own meaning.



*(c) Nicolas Alban*

The most drastic change in the band's line-up took place in 2008, when you discarded singer Julien Perez. Year Of No Light became a six-piece entity with two drummers, one bassist, and three guitarists, backed by some vintage synths. Back in the days when instrumental Post-Rock and Post-Metal were gaining popularity, I tried to convince friends to give some bands a listen, and I often received a reaction that it was somehow strange that there were no vocals. Now, however, instrumental bands and music have become widely accepted and the genre often appears as a soundtrack in movies and documentaries. How have you seen these genres develop throughout the years? I, for one, have the impression that the top has already been reached a couple of years ago (and that the best albums are already there) and now only the most important and best bands still matter.

It's difficult to answer this question because we never considered ourselves a Post-Rock or Post-Metal band, these definitions came after we started the band. The only thing we want to do is to make music that we can immerse ourselves in. I really like the investment people have in the Post-Rock and Post-Metal

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scene, for example I am thinking of the Dunk! Fest in Belgium or the Vivid Fest in Norway. All I can say is that it's always a pleasure to perform at these festivals, the people are just so great. However, I feel like we're eventually a psychedelic metal band.

**Throughout the years, some instrumental bands like Caspian and Long Distance Calling have started incorporating vocals. Is there also a possibility that Year Of No Light will do this, or will the band always remain an instrumental collective?**

I think we will do songs with vocals again. We have a few friends with whom we would like to try this kind of experience, but I don't see us becoming a band with a front man again.

**Singers are often the ones with the biggest ego in the band as they are in the spotlights. Year Of No Light, however, operates more as a collective, or so it seems. How important is the ego in Year Of No Light? Are all members equally important in regard to writing music and deciding on the musical direction, or is there a band leader amongst the ranks?**

There are always little ego concerns in a group, that's part of the game. But we always knew how to go beyond that. Everyone has their role and their own skills in the band, which is one of the reasons for this sustainability. For my part, I really like working on the arrangements and the composition, although I'm obviously not the only composer in the band. I also work a lot on the pre- and post-production of the album. It's really my thing, even though the other members were more present than usual on the last record.



The *"Vampyr"* record is a special one in your discography as it's a soundtrack written for 1932's silent horror movie *"Vampyr"* directed by Danish director Carl Theodor Dreyer. You also delivered an original score for Jean Rouch's 1955 short film *"Les Maîtres Fous"*. What other movies you think would be perfect to have a Year Of No Light soundtrack?

It would be really cool to do something for the most fucked-up episodes of the last season of Twin Peaks.

**At times, Year Of No Light took on the structure of an open collective and collaborated with contemporary French artists, such as Christian Vialard for a video installation reinterpreting Yves Klein's *"Monotone Symphony"*. This artistic modus operandi and your great deal of attention to your visual representation often reminds me of a band like Amenra. What other types of special collaborations or soundtracks or special shows would you like to do in the future?**

For my part, I would like us to be able to offer concerts with a lot of guest musicians, like an orchestra, a bit like Glenn Branca did.



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**A 2022 tour has been announced, although dates in Belgium and Holland are missing at the moment. Are you planning to add them to the planning?**

Yes of course, we love to play in Belgium and the Netherlands, the people are great. There will be announcements soon, but I can't say more at this time, sorry.

**Will the tour be focussing on the new record, or will it be a showcase of the band's 20-year long career, including older material as well? How difficult is it to put together a setlist, having very long songs and only a limited amount of playing time?**

I think we will definitely play three tracks from the new record and at least one track from “Ausserwelt” and “Tocsin”. For the moment we are trying to find a coherent set and it is not easy.

**If you could put a touring bill together with 3 other bands but from completely different genres, who would you bring with you on tour and why?**

Krypts from Finland and Fuoco Fatuo from Italy, because they are my two favorite Death Metal bands these days. For the third one, I would choose friends like Sordide from Rouen.



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