

ERECH LELETH – AS LONG AS THERE IS LOVE IN LIFE, I CAN WRITE MUSIC

Some musicians seem to have more hours in a day than others, and a musical thirst that can't be quenched by having 1 sole musical output. In the past, we conducted some interviews with multi-instrumentalists such as Michael Rekevics, Omar Kleiss, Demstervold and The Spectre. Erech Leleth, born in Germany, but currently residing in Vienna, the mastermind behind several newer bands such as Ancient Mastery, Golden Blood, Grandeur and Carathis, is up next to talk about what drives him in his various musical adventures. (JOKKE)



Ave Erech Leleth, it are very busy times for you with several recent releases, such as debut EPs by both Grandeur ("*Aurea Aetas*") and Carathis ("*Hymns to the Tower*"). What are you currently working on?

Ave Johan, quite busy times indeed. I'm currently working on several releases for different projects like "*Chapter two*" for Ancient Mastery, the next Golden Blood EP, the first albums of Grandeur, Haunted Palace, Carathis, and a few new projects, where I will expand to a few other genres like Pop and Folk. My focus right now lies on the Narzissus full-length "*Akt III: Erlösung*", which will be a tiny bit more experimental than the two EPs.

ERECH LELETH – AS LONG AS THERE IS LOVE IN LIFE, I CAN WRITE MUSIC

Let's go back to the start of your musical origins. Do you recall the first time you came into contact with Hard Rock or Metal music and which bands paved the way to the more extreme sides of Metal?

Through my older sister, I got in touch with punk music at the age of 7 with The Offspring's "*Americana*" album. After that, it was NOFX, Millencolin and Lagwagon, so I started my first Punk band when I was 12. Around that time my sister also introduced me to Manowar and Overkill, and right after that, I discovered the addictive choruses of Power Metal and the riffs of 80s Hair Metal. I got into Black Metal then via Torka's (Slovenia) "*Old Hatred*" album, which I downloaded on one of these Metal download blogs. I was really confused at first, but was also instantly hooked on those riffs in "*Night Sky*" that had a lot in common with the Punk riffs I was used to, but then they added a tritonus or a minor second and put justice to the ghoulish figure groveling on the cover of said album. Shortly after, I founded Der Toten Lebend Schein with an old friend from the Punk days, to explore the dark aspects of life, but still with youthful enthusiasm.

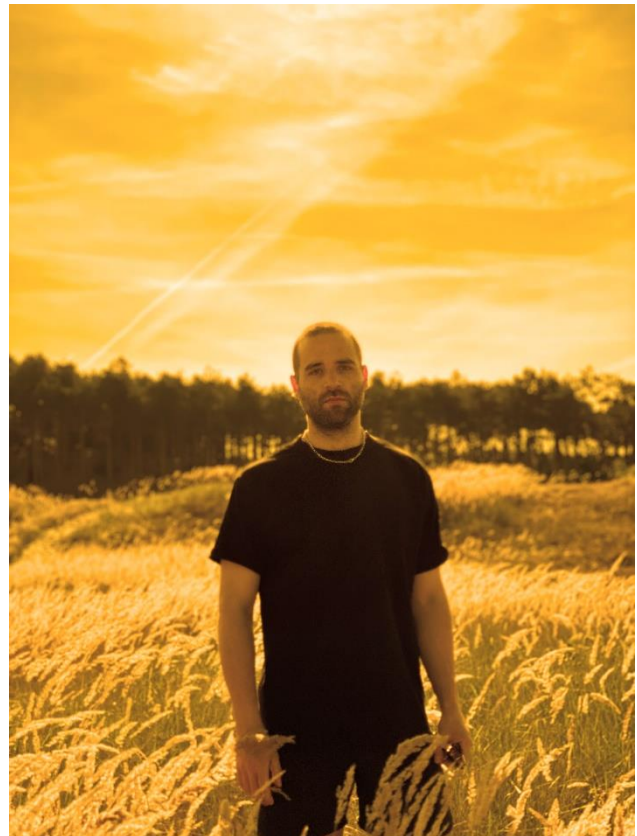
When did you decide to actively start working on your musical career and what drove you to it?

Winter 2018 I was on holiday in the Netherlands, shortly after I moved to Vienna. I felt a bit lost at that time, having left my friends and family behind in Western Germany and having just started my master's degree in Musicology in Vienna, which I was not so excited about. I did a Tarot reading and suddenly I knew where I could put my energy and focus for the coming years. But it really started to get going while I was writing the first Ancient Mastery album in Winter 2020, there was such an outburst of creative energy, that I was sure I was on the right way.

Being a multi-instrumentalist, what was the first instrument you picked up and what do you consider your primary instrument? Wherein lie your biggest musical challenges?

I wouldn't call myself that. After some flute and trombone lessons in my childhood, I picked up the electric guitar rather quickly and stuck to it. The bass and vocals just followed as a necessity. I am not a technically capable instrumentalist, so I know now where my limits are so if I need a "good" guitar solo or those killer Heavy Metal vocals for Golden Blood, I ask people who know their craft.

You are active in several one-man bands such as Ancient Mastery, Golden Blood, Grandeur, Narzissus and Haunted Palace. Was this a deliberate choice to be your own master or did your relocation from Germany to Austria have an influence on this, since I assume that it's harder to find like-minded souls in Austria compared to Germany?



ERECH LELETH – AS LONG AS THERE IS LOVE IN LIFE, I CAN WRITE MUSIC

I have played in a few bands prior to my one-man projects and although it was a lot of fun, there was just so much time wasted on discussing song ideas, all this organizational stuff from taking band photos to agreeing on a band name, that I grew tired of looking for common ground. I can definitely imagine playing together with people again, but right now I will work on my projects exactly the way I want.

Why this move to Austria, if I may ask?

I was writing my bachelor's thesis and was walking through Bonn, where I've been living for a few years at that point, and met so many people I got to know through those years on this little walk that I realized it was time to go. Shortly after, I met a girl from Vienna and was really inspired by what she was telling me about the city so that all of a sudden, I was sure about where to go. And because I'm a lazy fuck and didn't want to study another language, I thought Vienna would be the farthest away while still speaking my mother tongue.

Do you notice big differences in terms of a Black Metal scene and gigs in Austria compared to Germany?

I'm not really part of any scene, so I just don't know enough about the different scenes to give an educated answer. Furthermore, I can only talk about Vienna and not Austria as a whole, but I can say that there are a few quality metal concert venues, first and foremost the Viper Room.

Der Toten lebend Schein is active since 2010, whereas most of your other musical projects came to life rather recently during the past two years. Does COVID have something to do with this sudden creative outbreak?



No, not really. COVID didn't have a lot of impact on my everyday life, except that I had a bit more time during the lockdowns because I couldn't work on my part-time job, but apart from that it was more a personal development that took place around that time, although COVID could have acted as a catalyst.

You are currently active in seven different projects, at least the ones we know of. Is it easy for you to keep an overview of these different musical outlets? When composing, is it always very clear for you which band or project the music is destined for?

I have a plan in my head about the next releases for each project, although I don't have strict timelines. While composing, I switch between different approaches. One is writing riff after riff and then see afterwards into which project they could fit (or where they are needed) and the other is how I did it with the Ancient Mastery debut, where I only worked on this project manically for around two weeks in December 2020 until it was finished.

ERECH LELETH – AS LONG AS THERE IS LOVE IN LIFE, I CAN WRITE MUSIC

Creativity seems to run abundantly these days. Are you afraid that one day, you will have no musical ideas left on the table, or are you sure that the well of ideas will never run dry? Do you have any tricks to trigger your creativity?

I'm not afraid at all. For me personally, it's simple: as long as there is love in life, I can write music. And I fall in love quite easily, so I'm lucky. Of course, I don't want to release the same record again and again, so I'll try to be open to all kinds of influences. I rarely listen to any Metal records at the moment, because I spend so much time writing, recording and listening to my own stuff. I've just rediscovered Schubert and Mozart this summer, and while it isn't exactly inspiring me in a musical way while writing, emotionally it's something I can always rely on.

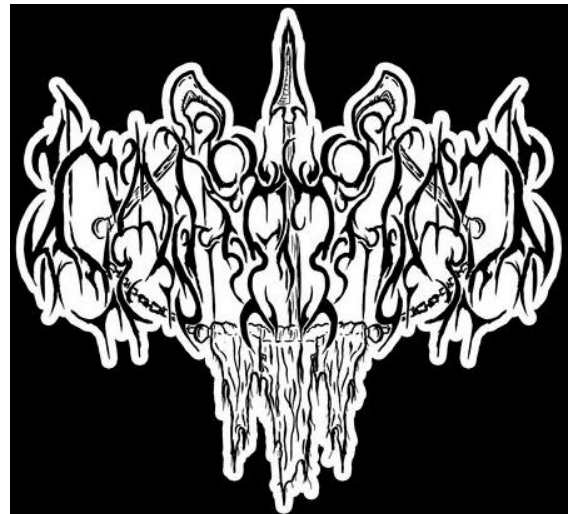
Although operating as Narziss in Narzissus or Asmodi in Order of Iſtar, your most used alias is Erech Leleth or Ερεχ Λελεθ. Although it sounds like being taken from J.R.R Tolkien's books, I have no clue what it refers to. So, enlighten me!

Erech has two meanings: 1. The mountain Erech in the "*Lord of the Rings*" with a stone on top, where the people swore an oath to Isildur, whose fulfilment Aragorn later requested to bring the army of the dead to the battle, and 2. it is also the biblical name for the Mesopotamian city of Uruk. After getting to know the Epic of "*Gilgamesh*," I've been fascinated with the Sumerian, Akkadian, Babylonian and Assyrian history and their gods and goddesses. Leleth is just a stylised version of Lilith, so also with Mesopotamian roots itself, but with so much more meaning today as a symbol of female passion and sexuality and eventually empowerment.

Thematically, some of your projects, such as Carathis and Ancient Mastery, seem to deal with topics such as fantasy and Gothic fiction. What are some of your favourite writers, books/novels and why? What attracts you into this genre? Is it a matter of escapism out of this cruel and harsh modern world?

In my youth it was mostly escapism that drew me to the mythical fantasy realms, but nowadays it just adds another layer to reality for me. These stories don't happen in an isolated world, but they're stories and ideas we can add to our own history, on top of the existing world. My favorite by far is the "*Osten Ard*" trilogy by Tad Williams. It has such an amazing love to detail and a carefully crafted character development.

"Vathek" by William Beckford, which was the inspiration to Carathis, is a rather Faustian story. The heinous and ambitious caliph Vathek succumbs to his hedonistic hybris and performs horrible rituals with his mother Carathis. He becomes obsessed over the girl Nouronihar and in the end, they enter damnation together. In Goethe's "*Urfaust*," Gretchen is also condemned in the end. The question of how much of moral integrity one is willing to give up reaching their goals is truly fascinating, be it career, romantic conquests or submitting to their craft. Although I believe that a little hybris now and then is necessary and morals are up for discussion, when it comes to a greater goal, Vathek and Faust show us how the greed and the lack of humility can only lead to certain damnation.



ERECH LELETH – AS LONG AS THERE IS LOVE IN LIFE, I CAN WRITE MUSIC

Is starting up a new musical project initially fuelled by a new genre you want to play, or rather by a new concept you want to explore thematically?

At the beginning there is always an “ästhetische Idee” (aesthetical or poetical idea, that can be found in Kant’s or Liszt’s aesthetics) that doesn’t have anything to do with a musical genre. It’s more visual and emotional and when this initial idea develops, I try to find a name for it. Mostly the logo and artwork are finished before the music, because for me it makes the composing a lot easier if I already have the concept enclosed visually.

Ancient Mastery tells the story of the realms of Valdura in four chapters. The first one released was called “Chapter One: Across the mountains of the Drämmarskol”. In which fantasy world is this realm located?

At the end of “Chapter One” the heroes enter the fantastical realm of Valdura. They have heard the stories of riches and a life galore behind the Forest Gate, and because the living conditions in their current place got worse and worse, they decided to heed the call. But as soon as they enter Valdura, they must discover that they’ve come to corrupt and depraved place. More will be revealed in “Chapter Two”.



Your second Ancient Mastery release, however, was “The Chosen One” EP that doesn’t seem to be part of the four chapters. Why not just focusing on continuing the story that started with the first full-length?

A few of the riffs on “The Chosen One” have been lying around for a few years and I needed to put them out there. Sometimes if I carry around a riff for several years, an urge is growing to immediately put it out there. So, the songs I wrote at that time turned out less epic and I thought an EP would be a good idea. The artwork by my friend Digital Sorcery inspired me to the title.

Ancient Mastery sounds very epic and bombastic, incorporating influences of bands such as Summoning or the (often despised and kitschy) Bal-Sagoth. What are some of the bands or classical music composers that influence your writing and composing in this style?

I really love kitsch and for me, it’s not a negative attribute to music, because kitsch is catchy and catchy is good! I admit that I haven’t listened intensively to any of the classic Epic Black Metal bands like the ones you mentioned before I released “Chapter One”. After reading a few reviews and listening to Summoning, Caladan Brood and the likes again, I can obviously see and hear the similarities. There might be influences of classical composers, but if you break down the songs of Ancient Mastery to its core, it’s Pop with a few Classical (rather neoclassical) sounding themes and screams.

ERECH LELETH – AS LONG AS THERE IS LOVE IN LIFE, I CAN WRITE MUSIC

I must say that, when checking out some of your musical projects, I initially thought you were situated in the extreme right wing. This was due to the war-themed band Golden Blood with a song like *“For blood and glory”* and your band pic wearing a white balaclava and showing a bullet belt. On your Narzissus Bandcamp page, however, you send a big fuck off to NSBM. Have you been accused of NSBM-connections so that you wanted to make this statement?

“For Blood & Glory” was written as an anti-war anthem. The song was inspired by *“Es ist an der Zeit”* by the leftist singer-songwriter Hannes Wader, who describes the horrors of war and condemns that the young man who fell in battle, at whose grave the narrator is standing, didn't realize that the real enemies are not the soldiers of the opposed army, but the ones who profit and tell their empty lies of honor, glory, blood and fatherland, the *“Masters of War”* like Bob Dylan sang. Laura sings *“The enemy's not in the field, it reigns in the skies”* and the chorus lyrics *“For Blood & King we shall bring withering glory”* are meant in a bitter and ironic way. But there were even people who interpreted some Ancient Mastery lyrics as meant to be against the Sinti and Roma, so I guess people will always hear what they want to hear.



Coming from the punk scene, I've always been a liberal leftist. I'm not apolitical and I'm tired of the same old answer of bands that their music is not political. This already is a political statement. The human being is a zoon politikon and although I believe in artistic freedom, spreading national socialist propaganda is certainly not covered by it. There are enough people in the scene, who will insist on their views, that representing national socialist ideals is the ultimate transgression (just look at the Ukrainian scene around M818th and the Asgardsrei festival, with real paramilitary connections), but that's just juvenile bullshit. So, again a big fuck off to NSBM!

Why this change in band name from Narziss to Narzissus?

There was a now defunct metalcore band in Germany called Narziss and they threatened to sue me if I didn't change my name, so I gave in to that to avoid a headache.

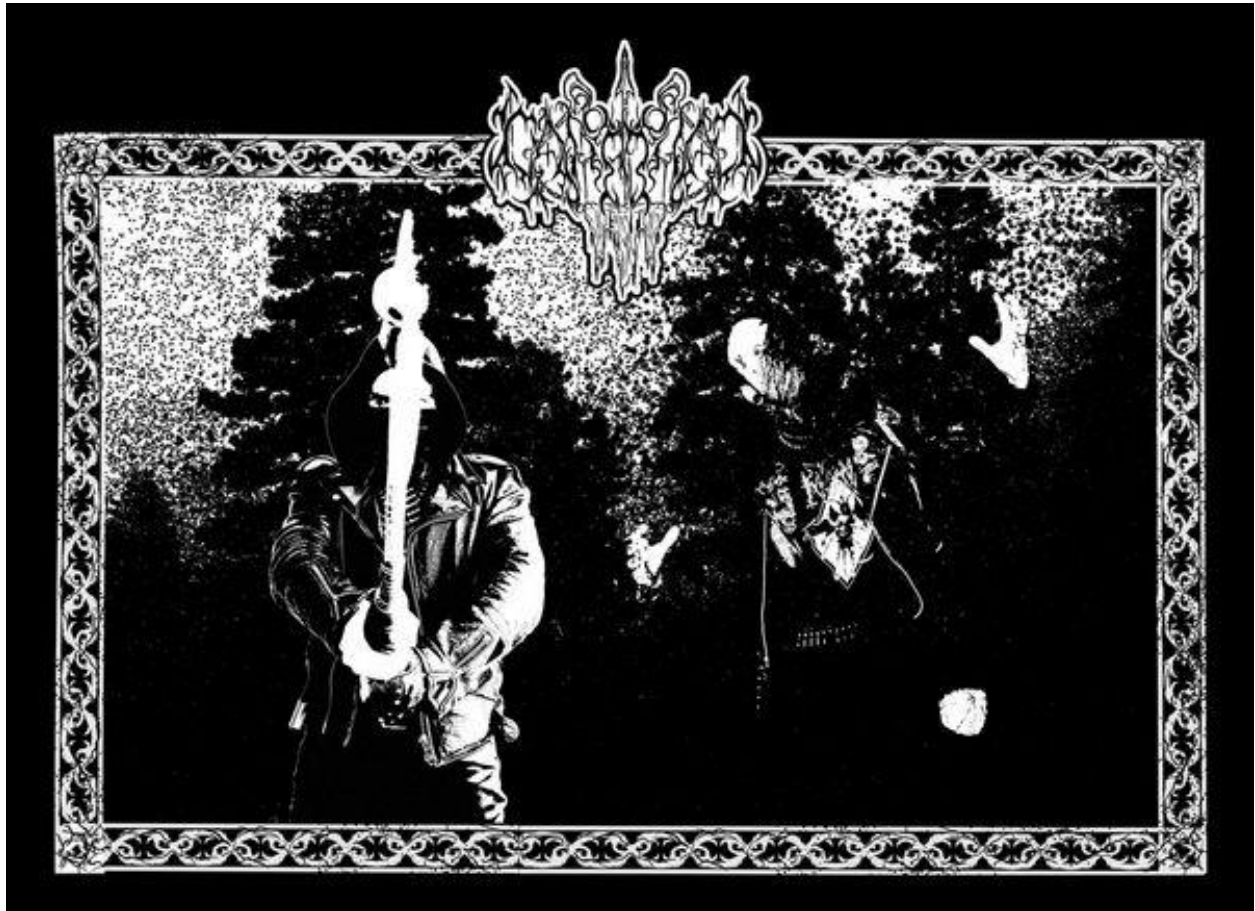
Golden Blood bears influences from a plethora of genres such as Black Metal, Thrash Metal, Heavy Metal and Punk, and the *“Serpent Chariot”* full-length includes international contributions by current Annihilator drummer Fabio Alessandrini, several lead guitar players, string quartet performers and male/female vocalists. Has this record been your most challenging realization so far?

Yes. The songwriting started in early 2019 and was finished after two years. Because of the more traditional Thrash and Heavy Metal approach, I realized that I needed help of session musicians to do justice to my vision. It took a lot of time and money, but I'm happy that it's finally out there and it will be released in the next months in all physical formats as well.

ERECH LELETH – AS LONG AS THERE IS LOVE IN LIFE, I CAN WRITE MUSIC

As stated in the beginning of this interview, your most recent releases (and in my opinion also your 2 best ones) are the debut EPs from both Grandeur and Carathis. For Carathis, you are joined by the terrific Swedish drummer Skoll. Why did you decide to opt for a drummer for this release, and not to handle the drums yourself?

It's interesting that your favorite releases of mine are the ones I wrote and recorded in a really short time. Grandeur was written and recorded in one day and the Carathis songwriting took about 2 days. About Skoll: I am no drummer myself. Most of the drums you can hear on my releases are programmed, but I plan to shift away from that for my next releases, if possible. I got in contact with Skoll about his projects, and when he offered his services as a session drummer, I knew he would fit the sound of Carathis perfectly.



Carathis exists solely for the purpose of worshipping the Queen of the Tower, is stated on its Bandcamp page. What can you share us about the concept of *"Hymns to the tower"*?

As stated earlier, it's loosely based on William Beckford's novel *"Vathek"*. This EP tells a fictional story of a takeover of a country to honor the Queen of the Tower, Carathis herself. So, each song tells a step on the ladder towards power. The upcoming releases with this project will go further into detail.

ERECH LELETH – AS LONG AS THERE IS LOVE IN LIFE, I CAN WRITE MUSIC

***“Hymns to the tower”* is currently only digitally available? Will there also be physical formats?**

Yes, there will be tape, vinyl and (most certainly) a CD version in the coming months. When all is set, the announcement will be made.

Grandeur’s debut EP *“Aurea Aetas”* was originally self-released digitally and afterwards on limited cassette, but it also received a CD treatment by Personal Records - as a unique transparent disc - and with a brand-new bonus track, not to be featured elsewhere. Will there also be a vinyl edition and what is your preferred physical format to enjoy music? Does this preference depend on the music genre?

Yes, there will be a vinyl version next year. As you may know, the pressing plants are way too busy these days, that’s why it takes so long. Personally I enjoy vinyl the most, because I love to look at the artwork in that size.

With Grandeur, you thematically focus on the quest for the Aurea Aetas, the golden age, which may lie in the past or the future as a vanishing point to leave this world behind. The opening track *“!/: Acatalepsy”* means the incomprehensibility of things; the doctrine held by the ancient Skeptic philosophers, that human knowledge never amounts to certainty, but only to probability. Do you consider yourself a skeptic most of the time?

No, I don’t. Some people told me that I should be more skeptical, but my faith in life, people and a positive outcome is far too strong. With the song title I wasn’t referring to the philosophical Pyrrhonist concept of acatalepsia, but just to the Greek word for the inability to comprehend something.

Do you have plans of taking one of your projects to the stage for live shows?

No specific plans right now, but I’d love to put together a Golden Blood live show in the future. Maybe in 2-3 years, but right now I want to focus on writing and releasing music.



Although running the labels Doctrina Carnis and Ad Victoriam, productivity with both of them seems to be quite low and most of your output is released by other labels such as Death Kvlt Productions, Personal Records, Pest Productions and Ad Victoriam. What are your aims with your own labels?

Low productivity is the key word here, haha. Doctrina Carnis was born out of the urge of my friend C. and me to create something together and I’m sure there will be some releases on that label in the future, when the time is right. Ad Victoriam was more a spontaneous idea while spending the last summer on a small Greek island without a guitar, and I thought it would be nice to put my energy into something connected with music, without creating myself. But I realized quickly that I’m not able to give it enough of my blood & sweat, if it’s not my own music. So right now, Ad Victoriam is on hold.

Any final words to add?

Thanks a lot for your intriguing questions! Listen to Tåkeheim!

This interview has been published on www.addergeroed.com on October 19, 2021.