

ILD – THE HUMAN STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL IN THE MIDST OF A COLD, INDIFFERENT NATURE

Lately, we have been impressed by "*Fandens Lykteskjær*" the first full-length by Horgmo, the entity behind one-man Black metal band Ild. The album is a melancholic and somber landscape, brimming with atmospheric riffs and haunting wails from far within the deep and dreadful forests and forgotten settlements of times long past. A reverence to the traditional Norwegian Black Metal. Together with Horgmo, we dive into topics such as death, the harshness of nature, woodcarving, and hunting. (JOKKE)



(c) Ild

Hail Horgmo. How are you doing? What have you been up to in recent times concerning Ild?

Hail, and thanks for asking me for an interview. It has been three months since the release of Ild's debut album "*Fandens Lykteskjær*" and the reception has been quite overwhelming, to be honest. The last few weeks I have started writing some new lyrics and riffs and began working with visual ideas for the next album.

Ild means 'fire' in Norwegian. Whereas I automatically link most Norwegian Black Metal with 'ice', you chose for the opposite element 'fire'. What does fire symbolize for you, and why did you choose it as the ideal moniker for your music?

In Norway, burning wood is one of the main sources of heating in winter, so when I think of fire, I also think of cold. I cannot imagine the one without the other. There is a fire in my hearth as I am writing this. I feel the heat on my back and the cold of the floorboards at the same time. Sitting around a campfire, you are warm in front, but cold on the back. You are in a circle of light surrounded by darkness. It is all about the contrasts of heat and cold, light and dark, life and death. Fire is at the same time a violent,

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destructive force and a necessity for life for most of human history. To me “Ild” symbolizes the human struggle for survival in the midst of a cold, indifferent nature. We huddle around a campfire, desperately trying to keep the cold, the wolves and the depression at bay.

You debuted with the “*Knippe*” demo in 2020. Were the ideas for Ild brooding for many years, or was it a recent outburst of creativity that led to the inception in 2020? Is Ild your first musical endeavour?

I actually decided to start the project without having any musical ideas. They came later. I have been a metal fan since my teens and a black metal fan since my early twenties, but I had never played in a metal band before. Ild is not my first venture into music, though. I taught myself to play guitar when I was 15 and I have played bass in the dark post-punk band This Sect for twenty years. Then one day last year, I read the booklet of Afsky’s excellent “*Ofte Jeg Drømmer Mig Død*”. Ole wrote about how he tried to bring the old Danish texts to life “with music that deeply engages my soul”. That line stuck with me and an idea for a black metal project started to form in my mind the next days. It suddenly felt important to make music that engaged *my* soul. When I sat down to make riffs and lyrics it was like breaking a dam. The surge did not stop until I had made an EP and the album. I called the first song I made for Ild “*Hjemkomst*” (“Homecoming”), because the whole process felt like coming home.



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Ild seems to mostly deal with the harsh life of old Norwegian peasants, nature's power over humans and the inevitability of death. Why did you choose these overall themes to sing about and write music for? Do you feel connected with these peasants in one way or another?

Some years ago, one of our children died just a few weeks after birth. In the empty darkness following, it was a comfort for me to know that a few generations back, this was a common experience. That connection through time made it easier to bear the unbearable. With Ild, I knew I did not want the music to deal with some abstract or mythological evil, but with real human darkness. As I find modern society with its superficial happiness and single-use instant gratification endlessly boring and meaningless, it was more interesting to look back at a time where real matters were closer at hand. I both feel a connection with older ways and values and a shared fate through time. Life was harsher then than now, but I think they also looked back in time in search for meaning. That is maybe why you can detect a "memory of paganism" in the music, as one reviewer put it. Black metal should feel both archaic and timeless.



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In 2020, I watched a Belgian TV-show called "*Het Hoge Noorden*" ("*The High North*") wherein a journalist followed some of my countrymen who decided to start a new life in Norway, most of them on a remote island, very far north or in the wilderness. Although it's mostly not an easy life, most of them easily found a new job as a farmer, a shepherd or as a doctor since young Norwegians leave the small villages behind to go live in the cities. This seems to become some sort of problem for a country like Norway. How do you see this evolution where small villages will be abandoned in the coming years?

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Good question. It is not for me to tell anyone where to live, especially not living in Oslo myself (haha), but I think we lose something important when we end up living in an environment that is a hundred percent man-made. We lose touch with old traditions and crafts, and we get alienated from food production and agriculture. Just a hundred years ago, the average person knew a lot about making and mending what you needed in your life and how to grow or hunt for food. What you bought in a shop would also be recognisable to you as something made out of wood, leather or metal. Nowadays, nobody knows how anything works, we cannot mend even the simplest appliance and we worship everything new just because it is something new. I think the movement from the countryside to cities accelerates all this and when it all eventually breaks down one day, no one will know how to survive. Subsistence farming and traditional crafts should have a much more important place in society.

You live in Oslo but also seem to be very attracted to nature. Is it easy for you to find the right balance between an urban and a rural life?

Yes, I think so, but it is a balance heavily tipped towards nature. Although Oslo is the largest city in Norway, 1600 km² of forest surrounds it. I live on the outskirts of the city, close to the forest Østmarka and walk around there with my dog almost every day. I seldom venture into the city center, and when I do, it is mostly for concerts.

I especially appreciate walking in the woods at night with no flashlight. Your eyes adjust quite fast and then you are completely alone with the trees and the stars. There is nothing like it. We often talk about nature as something vulnerable that needs our protection. Out there, in the woods, you know *you* are the vulnerable one and that humans are inseparable from nature. The worst thing Christianity ever taught was that we should multiply and subdue the earth. Even most people who are not religious believe this; that humans have some kind of special mission or place on earth. We are not special, just a species with no predators that have soon exhausted our base of existence. Nature will restore the balance for sure, but it looks like we are on the wrong end of that scale.

Not only on the album covers but also on your Instagram page, you share many old pictures of Norwegian peasants. However, the title of your full-length means “The devil’s lantern”. What’s the link between the title, the music and the artwork?

The correct translation is actually “A gleam of light from the devil’s lantern” and it refers to a myth connected to a lake in Østmarka forest. In the 1800s many people reported seeing a light at a certain place near the shore of this lake, but when they approached the place, the light disappeared. It was thought to be the devil (“Fanden”) trying to lure people away into the dark forest. I found it a fitting title to an album that deals with death, mental illness, and despair. The album is in large part based



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on personal experiences of embracing the darkness to handle life. Choosing to follow that gleam of light into the woods. People used to believe that the devil was roaming the countryside trying to steal people's souls, but you could also use his powers to your advantage, if you knew the right ways.

I had an idea for the cover inspired by Earth's *"HEX; Or Printing in the Infernal Method"*: to use photographs in a way that hinted at an unknown or forgotten, occult past. I came across the front cover photo of the lumberjack in his cabin and it had everything; his tired look of resignation, the dark timber walls, the fire. When I realized it was a part of a larger series of photos, the songs suddenly felt like the laments of these sombre men, in the long, cold winter nights. Exhausted from the hard work in the woods, they stare into the fire in search of a meaning beyond to this mortal coil, but they find only Death holding the Devil's lantern in his left hand, and they follow that light on a path that grows ever darker.

***"Vuggevisen"*, the closing track on *"Fandens lykteskjær"*, is a cover of a Norwegian folk song written by Jens Gundersen in 1949. How important are these local and traditional songs for Ild's music?**

I find much inspiration in old folk songs, psalms, ballads and lullabies of the somber kind. They are a link to the past and echo some of truths about human existence that I think we have lost somewhere along the way. Of course, I am also influenced by black metal: the gloomy atmospheres of Drudkh, the melancholy of Burzum, the unholy mystery of Armagedda, the cosmic occultism of Urfaust and the simplicity of Darkthrone, to name a few. I try not to emulate others or stick to certain genre rules but carve my own narrow path through the black metal wood. However, it is not of high importance to be original, as long as the music feels right to me and is recognizable as Ild.



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Is this your main source of inspiration music wise? Why did you specifically go for this cover song?

I chose to cover “Vuggevisse” (“Lullabye”) as it means a lot to me personally. When our son died, we had it sung at his funeral. It is a beautiful and sad song about the realities of life and death, the eternal turn of the wheel. The chorus translates as “Some arrive, some depart/Some die in the spring of life/Stars shine white.” Life is fleeting but the stars last forever. “Vuggevisse” was the first song ever played on Norwegian television, which for me signifies that death had a more natural place in life just a couple of generations back. I alone carried the coffin with my son to his grave. The song “Jeg senker mine små i jorden” (I lower my young into the ground) from “Knippe” is inspired by that experience.

I recently received a comment from a member of Jens Gunderssen’s family that he liked my version of “Vuggevisse”. I did not expect that and it meant a lot to me. Darkness has a wider appeal than we tend to think.



Jens Gunderssen

The song was also featured on Old Mill Productions “Life’s Persistence” compilation to benefit the Canadian Cancer Society and the Ross Memorial Hospital, which is of course a great initiative. Why did you want to contribute to this project?

Again, the answer is death. My wife’s sister died from cancer when she was only a teenager. After that I decided to go into health care and have worked in a hospital ever since, so cancer prevention is a cause

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close to my heart. Old Mill is an excellent folk metal label, and it was an honor for me to be included. “Vuggevisen” felt like the natural choice for this compilation.

You practice the old craft of wood carving. How did you end up doing this?

I learned all kinds of woodworking from my grandfather. He was a master carver and well known in his local community. Carving mostly rural figurines like a milkmaid churning butter or a hunter heading home with a pair of antlers on his back, and different animals like moose and bear. Every time we visited my grandparents, he and I would be away in his carpentry shop all weekend, only emerging for meals. He allowed me to use all his tools except the band saw and his carving tools, which he thought were too sharp and dangerous for a little kid. Therefore, I never carved myself when I was a kid, but I sat around for hours and watched him when he did. He passed away in 2014, and my grandmother gave me his set of carving gouges. When I tried carving myself, I discovered that my hands just knew how to do it, even though I had never carved before. I must have picked up a lot just by watching the old master.

What kind of energies are being channelled while carving in wood? What does it do with your mind?

Carving wood is a very calming experience, a bit like watching a fire. It feels like something deeply rooted in my soul. For most of human history, we have used our hands to make and mend things, so this makes sense to me. Our bodies did not evolve only to use our eyes, or our fingers just to poke a glass surface.

I dedicated “*Fandens Lykteskær*” to the memory of my grandfather and my son, who was named after him. I like to imagine them sitting around the stove in the carpentry shop beyond the stars, silently chipping away on a piece of wood while the fire crackles.



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You mainly seem to carve birch demon figurines. What do they symbolize for you?

I carve many different things, and sometimes I do not know what the result will be. I just follow the structure of the wood and see where it leads me. One day I ended up carving what looked like a demon or devil. When the time came to release "*Knippe*" on tape, I thought it fit nicely with the music, and decided to make ten demons for a special tape edition. They sold out immediately, and ever since people kept asking me about those demons, so I have been carving new ones on commission. I carve almost every day anyway, so this is a nice side thing to the music. You can call them demons, 'Fanden', or whatever. Small idols to worship the dark aspects of nature and life.

For the release of various formats of your work, you collaborate with labels from all over the world. Was this a deliberate decision or just something that happened organically along the way? Which labels are you currently working with?

The original plan was just to self-publish "*Knippe*" on Bandcamp, but right before the release I decided to send it to one, small underground label – Screaming Skull Records (SSR). They quickly decided to release it on tape. Not long after that, Raise the Dead Productions in Colombia asked SSR for permission to release it on CD. Finally, another small Norwegian label, Lilla Himmel, contacted me with a vinyl offer. In short, I was very fortunate with my first release. The same happened with "*Fandens Lykteskjær*". SSR released the cassette and CD, and then Poisonous Sorcery contacted me with an LP offer after the single "*Fanden Tok Mine Beste år*" was out. Everything has just happened without much effort on my part, so I am very happy with the situation. I guess many bands dream about a large label that can put out all formats and take care of the promotion, but in my experience dealing with small underground labels is dealing with true enthusiasts that care deeply about your music.



The initially planned US-release of the "*Knippe*" demo, however, seemed to be a massive hoax. What happened?

An American label that I will not deign to name contacted me. They wanted to release a US version of the tape, and it all sounded very decent, so I agreed. Then the red lights started to go off. This person did not answer my questions, there was no update on the progress, and he started to make endless bad excuses for why the release did not materialize. In hindsight, I was far too patient with him. At one point, other bands started to cut the ties with this label, and I decided enough was enough. Then his house of cards came down quickly. All traces of the "label" are now gone from the internet. Screaming Skull Records quickly decided to make a

second print of the "*Knippe*" tape to make up for this mess.

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What is the idea behind its cover photo depicting a hanged bird?

It is actually *two* stock pigeons killed in a hunt. Traditionally they hang this way to ripen the meat. The two birds are literally a “knippe” (sheaf/bundle), the title of the EP. They are also a reminder that death is a necessity for all life. To me this photo is neither “badass”, “sick” nor “cruel”, as some have commented. It is an image of death and the old ways. One person asked me why anyone would need to hunt now that you can buy meat in a store. How it is possible to be so far removed from nature that you find two dead wild birds, who flew free until those shots hit them, more shocking than industrial farming?

I shot the photo myself on a friend’s farm up in Trøndelag. The old ways live on.



You will appear as a guest vocalist and lyricist on Swedish Black Metal band Grimtone’s upcoming full-length. How did this collaboration come to be? Is there a difference in writing lyrics for your own music or for someone else’s projects?

This happened because of mutual friends. Livløst, who made the intro track for “*Fandens Lykteskjær*” had collaborated with Michael of Grimtone before. Grimtone contacted me with the offer to sing on three tracks of their new album. A condition on my part for doing this was that I could choose the songs I wanted to do and write the lyrics in my own style. It was interesting to try my hand at English lyrics. I find it much harder to write original lyrics in English than Norwegian, but I think they turned out quite good. While I like to maintain total control when it comes to my own music, it was nice to just focus on one aspect and let others worry about the rest. When that is said, I can absolutely vouch for the finished material. The album will be out sometime next year.

What can we expect from Ild in the near future?

Colombian Raise the Dead Productions just released “*Knippe*” on a beautiful digipack CD, which will also be available in Europe soon. Poisonous Sorcery will release “*Fandens Lykteskjær*” on vinyl in early 2022, probably March or April. Before that, Screaming Skull will release a very special collaboration with another artist on the label. I cannot tell you much more about that yet, but it is something unique that I hope people will appreciate. We are also waiting for the pressing of a split 7” with Livløst. Vinyl pressing times are ridiculous these days, but I hope it will be out before summer 2022.

Thanks for the interview!

Thanks for some interesting questions and for supporting the underground!

This interview was published on www.addergebroed.com on December 4, 2021