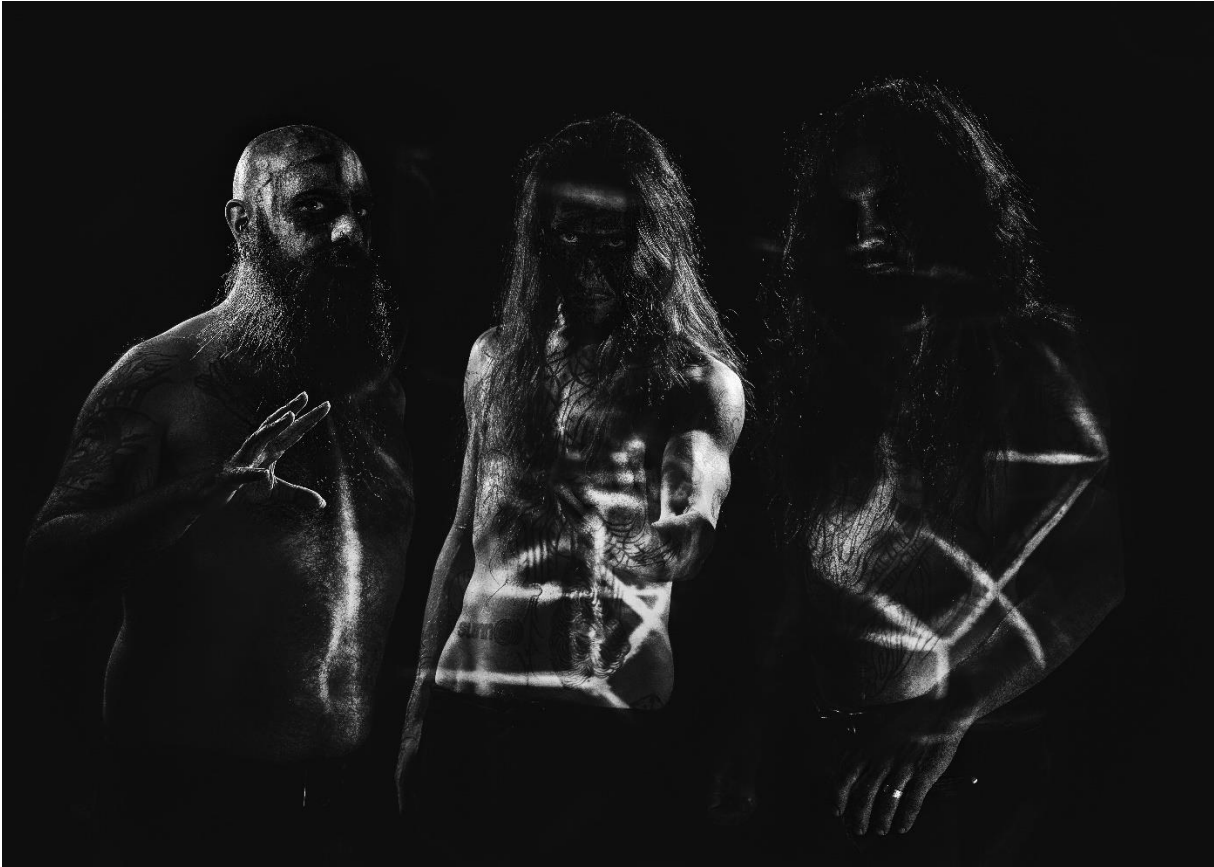


HERZOG – THE PATH OF THE DISCIPLE

Herzog is a new Black Metal entity hailing from Belgium, formed years ago by Asgeir Amort but never brought to life. The debut full-length *“Furnace”*, released by Amor Fati Productions, shows a distilled version of their black art, working with shapes that should not go together. Yet, they do so through a craftsmanship worth a thousand working devotees. We spoke with Asgeir Amort, who isn’t used to doing interviews, but nevertheless gave some very interesting insights. (JOKKE)



Although Herzog manifested itself physically anno 2023, the seeds for this band were planted many years ago. Why did it take so long for Herzog to be brought to life?

Some years passed between the origin of the band, the crafting of the album and its concept and the actual release of the first material in November 2023. Although the original intent existed even earlier through the act of creation, the tentativeness of laying down coherent and cohesive music that tells a story like *“Furnace”* needed a big amount of work for us to be able to present something we can stand behind artistically.

I’ve been doing music for the last 15 years, mostly by myself, and it took some time to find a balanced and proactive way to lay down what would become the creative life I’m focusing on today. I like to believe that *“Furnace”*, being a very intimate album, serves to present the emotions one is to endure through the path of discipline. I like to compare my professional life as a craftsman with my experience in the Black Metal scene, although my presence in it started either late or early in my life depending on how you see it.

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Did Herzog initially start out as a one-man project, or was it meant to be a band with a full line-up from the beginning?

I could say both, and this is still true to some level. Herzog doesn't need anyone else outside of the compositions to exist, but Herzog is also very flexible in welcoming anyone who could serve the cause of the project. I don't believe Herzog is bound to be anyone in particular but the ones who are determined to serve, understand the process of writing Herzog riffs and melodies, and find themselves resonating with the project. At the moment Herzog is Déhà, Hochofen and myself, three people who are the foundation of the composition team. I will also get help from some musicians I am yet to determine for the live gigs and maybe even for future compositions.

How do the music and the songs take shape?

Herzog's music has a specific way to be written, it has to serve the melodic tension and later on, the meaning. Every melody finds itself in a continuous evolution of colors, shapes, curves and contrasts, which is the first layer. If that cohesion complies with some simple set of rules I set myself for writing, then this song will go to the next process.

Herzog is built upon a dual guitar dialogue, sometimes they are antagonists, sometimes they support each other, but they always complete each other - they are at the base of everything concerning Herzog's musicality. So much so that every guitar track of the album has been recorded long before the drums, which were composed on the spot. Thanks to Déhà's wonderful ability to record 3 times faster than anyone else in the business, this detail did not reveal itself to be much of a challenge for us at the end of the day.

Déhà has been of great importance for Belgian Black Metal in the past couple of years. How important was his contribution for the outcome of "*Furnace*"?

Déhà has given everything BUT the last word. He is the kind of worker that can line up 12 days of 12 hours of working straight and still finds it in him to listen carefully to the needs of the artists he's working for or with. He is beyond what the common folk would be able to do and I'm pretty sure he is the hand that pushed this record to be at the level of my demandingness.

Although working with him is still the real challenge that this kind of music requires, the man switches once he sits behind the console and only the purpose and the result matter when working with the given performance. He definitely made me grow as an artist and as a musician and brought up the need to be emotionally honest and sincere to the extreme during the recording of this album.

He offered the full range of possibilities - and the real insight in them - throughout the carving of the sound. After the first layers of composition were done, when the drums had taken their spot, when the bass and the mix went their own way to ultimately determine something that before were just naked guitar melodies. He was careful every step along the way to be certain that the project wouldn't go too far or would stray too far from the original intent. He worked as a guardian who kept the end result safely in his hands.

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Besides some vocal guest appearances for Brouillard and Yhdarl, there's no track record of your previous bands. Is Herzog your first band and more specifically the first time you explore Black Metal?

"Furnace" is my first full-length and a first draft for something that could become much more diverse in the future. I have a few different projects that are in the recording process that may be released in the near future. I also have 3 or 4 other projects that are at different levels of composition/recording.

My dedication to the scene has been more observable in earlier years through my participation in the scene decoration at various shows and festivals that took place, mainly in Brussels. I was in charge of the complete set up of lit candles or complex altars for some bands. I believe this to be the first experience where my need for high accountability and crafted aesthetic was satisfied. I could not thank L&M from A Thousand Lost Civilizations enough. They are the ones who gave me this kind of trust, from the early beginning, to be part of their own creation. It is there that I've truly met the practice of Black Metal, through the experience of major actors in the scene.

What's the meaning of Black Metal for you?

I believe Black Metal is a tool, a way to function, appeal and fit into an order of things. It is a set of practices that calls upon a sense of truth. Truth in emotions and a depth into the display of the (re-) enactment of them.

Freedom is also a huge, but paradoxical factor, because as much as the genre is closed up upon itself, and that the set of rules to fit into the discipline is somewhat vague but also pre-defined and entirely left to the audience to be judged, the freedom you find once inside the "self-made" box you are constrained to is endless. It is a practice of the self, meant to be displayed in the urge of necessity.

Why was the word 'herzog' chosen to represent the band's views?

I came to think about it naturally. I literally woke up one day thinking strongly about this word and the natural meaning it called upon me.

After close study on the origin of the German word 'herizogo', I found out it meant 'duke' or 'army leader' and therefore the signification of the noble title attributed to the vassal responsible for the borders of the lands, 'the march', where he solely was authorized to raise an army without the direct order/intervention from the king.



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It does only appeal to my personal interpretation of the term, to that original sensation, to that call of freedom. What better way to create a narrative of self-reliance and initiative than by raising armies in the name of the greater institution - that is the whole of my peers who preceded me, and the masses who are the audience - in the face of the world and to proclaim words of a certain wisdom, to proclaim the vain attempt that is to achieve this esoteric mean through the act of creation. To find oneself through the act of calling.

The journey of Herzog is a humble one, but in that modesty, there's still the will to raise fire and hell. And show the ashes to the world.

For the release of “Furnace”, a deal with German label Amor Fati Productions was inked. Why are they the perfect label for Herzog?

Because of the inherent quality of the bands that are signed on Amor Fati. Because the producer behind the selection is truly passionate and is strongly committed to welcome bands he really likes and supports. Therefore I can find myself at peace aside such dedication that proves itself to be a huge and reliable partner for the Herzog project. The overall quality of the bands present on the label speaks for itself.

It's quite difficult to compare Herzog's music to other bands, except maybe for the songs featuring lower vocals that remind me a bit of Norwegian Enevelde. Which bands serve as inspirational sources to distill Herzog's music from?

That kind of comment honors the content of the writing of Herzog. As a project, Herzog doesn't try to pursue any kind of affiliation or perpetuation of a dogma. I like to believe that the songs are exactly the way they are meant to be - for the purpose of their meaning.

My inspirations are vague...even for myself. I can't say that I follow much of a particular entity, mostly the inner sensation the construction of melodies offers through the first minutes of building up. If I can feel the song going in such honest direction, it's safe to say I'm going to be working on it at once for a few hours and that the whole result is only going to have minor changes compared to the final.

These last 3 years, I've been listening a lot to Emptiness, Nocturnal Triumph, Amestigon, Mount Eerie, Yellow Eyes, Djevel, Bestia Arcana, Ustalost, and Mgła.

There is a lot of dynamics going on in the songs due to the variation in vocal styles and you also opted to include an instrumental song, something we don't see that often in Black Metal.

Dynamics are indeed well integrated into the record. I wanted to make it evolve with as much care for the process of the journey as possible, and once again the only obstacle is my continuous research of emotions.

Now, I did not think about it too much when coming up with an instrumental song like “Craftsmen”. It serves the purpose because the song is literally the journey of a craftsman throughout the making of his art. The journey of creation that comes into the song as is as follows:

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- Development of the craft through repetition
- Evolution through greater spheres of understanding
- Confrontation of the reality and acceptance of the limits of the matter
- Ultimate revelation through the act of creation

Did it need voices and screaming to illustrate it in a more obvious way? I think not... Although answering your interview gives me the opportunity and platform to give this information to those who will care to find it. Thank you once again.

What are some of your all-time favorite instrumental songs?

Karma to Burn's discography. This might seem extravagant in this case but it has been from an early age a real teaching of how to give and say a lot only by riffing.

Will this variety in vocal range and styles be an element that will continue to be part of future Herzog-material, or was this first record more or less an exercise to discover different facets of your sound?

I guess both indeed. But I wouldn't see why this would change. So, as of today you could consider this variety indeed as an inherent part of the Herzog project.

Obviously, this first record couldn't be something different than what it is: a first record, a first shot at building something coherent, even though the variety of the compositions is really much intended, as much as the Black Metal formula allows to find new spaces and a form of freedom that fits the Herzog narrative. Where it will go to or what it should be from that point on, is part of the research I am doing through myself as an artist, and throughout this project.

I like to believe that to re-discover new ways to surpass myself - emotionally more than technically, although it is not meant to be easy to play - will bring me a sort of joy and accomplishment that is much more easy to share cause it comes from an inherent need. A need to write music and to share stories, the need to display the pain that tore apart your stomach or deflated your heart. It is that honesty that made me think it was ok to actually come with such a diverse project at once, and that the ones who would listen carefully or with curiosity might understand the different sides of the story. Because overall emotions do not come in standard format, we are the ones trying to simplify it to a narrower form, in the somewhat vain pursuit to share these in a different comprehensible form.

I'm very intrigued by the cover artwork, although I don't have any clue what I'm seeing. So please enlighten me! Who is responsible for this image?

The image you see is the workbench of the artist who made a physical stained glass triptych for the album. The workshop is located in Brussels and called l'Athanor, the artist is called Lior DePape.

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What you are seeing is the step where the painted shards of glass are put up together with strips of lead to ensure the great ensemble to be built as a whole. The art displayed here will be shown one way or another on the day of the release with several other exclusive tokens that I want to keep off the radar for now.

I also have to say that another craftsman has been involved into the Herzog journey, my luthier and friend Mael Niveau who works as the sole craftsman for Guitars of Altaïrs. Not only has he done the instrument of the project, he also pushed a trend into his making that is now part of the aesthetic of the project.



The Logo and design of the inside of the album were made by Gerard Sathan, a personal friend and quite famous dark tattoo artist from Belgium. The sigils and drawing that represent the two sides of the album have been drawn by my dear friend, acolyte in life and tattoo artist Sara Myling. The pictures present in the record have been done by the photographer O.Swinks.

I'm very humbled and grateful to every artist who put a part of their craft, of their knowledge and their soul into a project that's inherently about them. It is just fucking huge to be composing some music one day, and then the next day to find myself making a coherent workflow possible through the conjuncture of the 3 artists works. It took some time, but the intent of the project needed something of that scale to truly exist in its entire form.

Is there a link between the cover artwork and album title?

As the whole journey of the album represents the path of the disciple, to use physical artifacts that could enhance that story is a great opportunity which I'm very pleased of. Since early on, I have been introduced to the great work of art from the French "companion", which is a very traditional way to learn self-made craft traveling from master to master until you are yourself able to create a "Chef d'Oeuvre", recognized by your peers, which will conclude your learning journey.

Having been through such parallel path some part of my life, so did the artist behind the stained glass. We both found ourselves in a particular understanding about that topic even before we started to collaborate fully on this.

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Also the drummer's alias Hochofen seems to be referring to the album title, no?

Hochofen took this nickname as a tribute to his origins from the Wallonia industrial and metallurgy past of the region he originates from. He also came up with the "Furnace" term, which is an excellent starting point for us. As it can be linked to the origin of crafted matter.

What are some of the theme's covered in the lyrics?

"*Acheminement*" is about a mystic and complex travel through an inner mind where the perturbed relation to the physical world is paved with self-doubts. "*Melted Tesseract*" deals with lament of the disciple and first conclusions upon the revelation to come. "*Oath of Weakness*" is about stubborn self-realization and the need to overcome the tentation to change yourself according to the task or needs attributed to the role of the craftsman. "*Craftsmen*", as stated earlier, tells the journey of the craftsmen. "*All Rites*" is about multiple trials to reach a higher ground, always with that same certitude that all rites are vain. "*Oath of I*" deals with the lament about being stuck and not being able to reach higher grounds, to not being able to create that utopia and therefore admit "to live - but - by your side", which can be understood both ways. "*Oath of Us*" is composed by VJS as an answer to the previous song. His will was to take back the last melody and create the missing Utopia that was sort of lamented about in the previous track and give it a more materialistic/Idealistic resolution.

Do you have other shows planned besides the January show with Bones and Vortex Of End?

We have two shows planned with Vortex of End and Bones on January 12 in Brussels and January 17 in Paris.



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I can imagine that due to Déhà's extremely busy agenda playing live shows regularly is not an option, no?

It was planned with Déhà that he would play the first set of shows with us, but in the meantime it's a certainty that we will have to find another bass player for future live shows and, why not, ultimately for album recordings as well. I'm open for working with musicians and giving them the hints and the whereabouts of the Herzog project, and maybe giving them their own voice in the writing process if they are inclined to do so.

Herzog is not present on any social media platform, there's even no Bandcamp page. Is the true underground where you want Herzog to reside?

That I will plead guilty: the pages exist but they are hard to reach. Herzog.whatever was already taken many years ago, so I have been using the origin of the word "Herizogo" for the Bandcamp. An Instagram account exists, but I have little interest in using it actively for now... that might change, or not.

What's your view on the current state of Black Metal in Belgium? Is there some kind of scene according to you?

No opinion on the matter of the scene as "music scene" as, to me, the scene are the characters and the faces that compose the crowds. The expressions of the pure dedication that I can see from the artists I have the immense luck to share time and friendship with and the audience and the pure form of devotion of the art, have been the sole base from which Herzog has been created.

What are your 3 favourite Belgian Black Metal releases?

Aerdryk – *"Met de Drietand op mijn Huid"*, Emptiness – *"Vide"* and Heinous – *"Ritual, Blood and mysterious Dawn"*.

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