

AETERNUS – LET’S LOOK AHEAD

Aeternus was formed by Ares in 1993 in Bergen, Norway. The band pioneered the genre Dark Metal; combining Black and Death Metal with elements of Classical and Folk Music. The band created its trademark sound by layering exquisite guitar play and haunting, melodic interludes. The band celebrated its 30-year-long career with a special set at last year’s Beyond The Gates festival in Bergen. We caught up with Ares to jump back into the past, but of course we also wanted to talk about the great new album “*Philosopher*”, as it seemed that Ares is not really that nostalgic of a person and likes to look ahead rather than back. (JOKKE)



A European tour in support of Gorgoroth ended a couple of weeks ago. How did the tour go? Did you visit many new venues and cities? Was there a good turnout on the Belgian date?

Yes, this tour was awesome for us. It was really good and convenient to get to promote the new album by supporting Gorgoroth on these 11 gigs. It's also an honour to be on tour with a band of such calibre that I also played bass for myself for 2 years back in the 90's. Belgium was fucking cold, and it was a good show. I'd love to get back there during summer. Really cool place.

It was a real pity that the show in Ghent coincided with the Unholy Congregation fest (which I attended), as both gigs attract more or less the same audience.

Yes, festivals crash at times, what can you do?! We just have to play no matter what... It's worse for those folks who really want to catch 2 festivals but can't. Flip the coin, right (laughs)?

In support of “*Heathen*” (2018), Aeternus embarked on a first Latin American tour, playing in Mexico, Colombia, Brazil and Argentina. How was it to play in these countries compared to playing in front of Europe’s (often spoiled) audiences?

Right, Europe can be somewhat spoiled or overly exposed to bands, I guess. Still... One doesn't have to see everything. It's up to the individual. It was super awesome to go play so far away. A special and unique experience. Really awesome.

Until 2006, Aeternus has been releasing records with 1 up to 3-year intervals, but the pace slowed down from “*Hexaeon*” on. Did it become more difficult to write new songs at that point or did life get in the way due to becoming older and maybe having other priorities in life?

Hmmm, some other factors than just me composing slower as I seek cooler riffs and structures do play with, but it depends. Personally, it does take longer to make music than before. Age is not a factor. The quality just takes more time to flourish, right?! Because one gets pickier and more thorough. I'd change numerous things on several oldies if I had a time machine. I honestly do feel like I've made haste on some songs in the past, but I also stand 100% by them as they are on the albums. Of course, I know

AETERNUS – LET’S LOOK AHEAD

better now, so naturally one can listen to their own old shit and think: “Hmmm, well that could have sounded differently?”. However, it is what it is.

**How do you write the music nowadays, is it done as a band, or do you still write all music by yourself?
How big is the contribution from all members while creating music?**

I still compose the music, but the others structure it all with me and they are quick to tell me if a riff isn’t to their liking. Then I make another and just dump the one someone doesn’t like. Gorm made a lead worth mentioning for “*World Bleak Nepotism*” though, a fine and warm lead.

Aeternus parted ways with bass player V’gandr in 2012. However, the guy is still responsible for writing your lyrics. This time, lyrical topics seem to be more philosophical, hence the album title. Would it be possible to receive some details from V’gandr on the topics he wrote about?

I’m unable to find these notes, I must apologize and just say that the lyrics are very complex within the realm of philosophy.



To be honest, I lost track of Aeternus after “*Ascension of Terror*” as the Death Metal elements threaded too much on the foreground to my personal taste, although I certainly enjoy bands such as Morbid Angel or Decide. However, with “*Philosopher*”, you again seem to embrace more elements from the beginning of your career that defined your specific Dark Metal style. Was this an organic evolution of the new songs being written or did you deliberately want to reduce the Death Metal influences?

I personally feel I started looking into mixing and searching for the ancient vibe and atmosphere of the 90’s, merging it with the then present ideas for new music on the “*...And the Seventh his Soul Detested*” album and maybe even a tiny bit on the predecessor “*Hexaeon*”. It was never a huge venture or a thorough concept, nor was it some exit, escape or closure from the more Death Metal related music we had on the albums “*Ascension of Terror*” and “*A Darker Monument*”. It was just something we felt

AETERNUS – LET’S LOOK AHEAD

was good and we wanted to have the Dark Metal coming through, maybe stronger than on these two albums. We feel it does, but yes, we messed around a lot with Death and Thrash riffs on those 2 albums. “Heathen” was an album where we just kept that thing going with the old atmospheres, make good new riffs and songs, keep the category Dark Metal in focus. Make good music. Check. Done.

The same goes for “Philosopher”: Make badass music, keep the old feel, take new steps. Make it Dark. Check. Done. That’s all it is.

Do you think the pure folk elements that could be heard in the closing songs of your first albums will ever reappear on an Aeternus record?

Never say never.

What I have always liked about Aeternus are your deep but understandable vocals. Did it take a long time testing different vocal styles when you started out before you decided to use the style you’re known for?

Thanks a lot. I appreciate that. No, I started singing because I didn’t want to look for more members. I had a singer, he quit, a guitarist quit, a drummer quit...

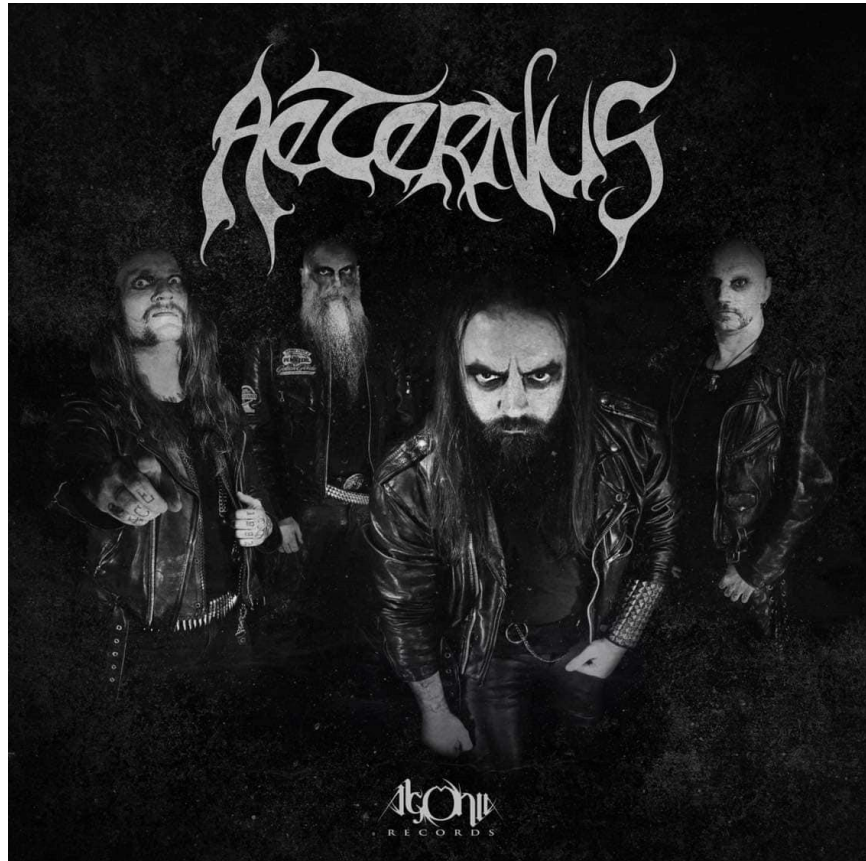
All this during the first year of the band. Annoying. So, like many guitar players I made up my mind: “Fuck this, I’ll sing myself!!!!”. At that time, I was a huge fan of Bolt Thrower and later on Deicide. So naturally that was what I aimed for. After a while I became very successful at imitating these bands in my room at home, so voilà, I had my Aeternus vocals.

Do you use special techniques to combine the depth of your voice with a good articulation?

I just do it. No special technique others don’t have. Just practice. No effects to the actual voice/sound you hear. Don’t smoke as a singer, not recommended after some years... With singing, that just isn’t a good mix.

In the last couple of years, many bands chose to dedicate their setlist, or even full tours, to playing one record in full. Aeternus has never done this so far. Have you ever thought about playing one of your classic albums in full for a special occasion? Which album would that be? Which record do you consider as the most pivotal in your career?

I personally don’t feel this is something I want to do. Certainly not because others do it. I don’t think it’s cool. It’s way cooler to promote and present the hard work that led to “Philosopher” and then play a little mix of whatever from this and that album instead of glorifying one single album.



AETERNUS – LET’S LOOK AHEAD

I must admit that I (and many with me) was looking forward to hearing you play many songs from your two first (and in my opinion best) records when you played the Unholy Congregation festival in 2022. But rather than being stuck to the past, you mostly played recent songs and 2, at that point unreleased, tracks from *“Philosopher”*. Does it annoy you that some part of your fanbase keeps on asking to play the old material?

No, it doesn’t annoy us at all, but we play first and foremost what WE want. We feel we try to include something of some sort of a ‘hit’ or two usually. Now we have so many albums out WE get stressed looking at the set list, so... It is what it is. Like it or not. With 9 albums out it’s pure logic the fans won’t get to hear 3 songs each from the first two albums when we have for example 45 minutes of playing time or whatnot at a show.

Aeternus played a special 30th anniversary show during the 2023 edition of the Beyond The Gates festival in Bergen, spanning the full career of the band. I’m very curious to know the setlist as I couldn’t find it online.

What that meant was basically something damn old, something from the first 2 albums, something in between and something very new.

This show included guest appearances by former members Morrigan and Vrolok. How was it to reunite with both of them during the rehearsals and to finally share the stage again? Was it strange to revisit some of the older songs after so many years?

We played *“Waiting for the Storms”* and *“Deaths Golden Truth Revealed”* together, and I don’t know how it was for them, but I assume it wasn’t a stressy job for Vrolok and Morrigan to find the braincells that remembered these songs. Vrolok is still active. I’m sure he just had a few listenings in his own drum room and Morrigan practiced on her own in her house. When we met and played it was a special and fun atmosphere. We played well, some minor tunings and polishing in section changes, agreeing on shit and all done. I personally thought I remembered more of *“Waiting for the Storms”* than I actually did, so I had an hour at my house scratching my head a bit. During the show, we had a blast....and we had a great time after the show. Goooooooood times!!! Good vibes, the old feeling. A splendid gathering and I’m so happy they both said yes to that!



AETERNUS – LET’S LOOK AHEAD

What are some of the ups and downs from your 30-year-long career worth mentioning? Are there any decisions or events you regret?

Meeehh... Dude, let’s look ahead! A huge UP is that I still got the band running full throttle, with 3 fantastic musicians who want the name Aeternus to still be out there as much as me. I am very grateful!

Up until “Hexaeon” (2006), all Aeternus albums have been recorded in the infamous Grieghallen studios where many genre classics have been recorded. Although you always returned to Grieghallen, every album has its own distinct sound, something that cannot be said from studios such as The Abyss of Necromorbus, that produced many records that sounded very similar. What makes Grieghallen and recording with Pytten so special? Would you say it’s the best recording studio for Black Metal music? What made you change your modus operandi for the last two records?

I have no idea how bands can sound the same unless they use the same guitars and pick-ups and amps in the same studio. Having the same studio and producer doesn’t mean it’ll be alike. Pytten was very good at extreme music, and we used him on 6 albums due to that! Then we felt: “Okay, let’s try and hope it’s smart to use another studio for the “...And the Seventh his Soul Detested” albums”. We had new members and many years had passed after “Hexaeon”. Then for “Heathen”, we felt we wanted to try Herbrand Larsen, Pytten’s old assistant and student as we felt we could totally trust him doing an Aeternus album. That was so successful we had little discussion on where we wanted to record “Philosopher”.

As far as Pytten goes, well the man obviously doesn’t have a fat red “Grieghallen sound” button on his sound desk and no other studio has that either. He was just damn good and helped metal bands produce bad ass albums with his understanding of extreme music and his skills and his ideas, listening to all that chaos. He also liked it, he was as hungry as the bands. He wanted it.

Gorgoroth, Immortal, Enslaved, Taake, Burzum, Hades Almighty, Aeternus, ... Bergen has spawn forth many great (Black) Metal bands and is often referred to as Norway’s capital of Black Metal. Why do you think Bergen was such a hotbed for many of the greatest bands the genre has delivered?

Just coincidence really.

Many of these bands started out as a Death Metal band but switched to Black Metal. Aeternus, on the other hand, never wanted to be labelled as Black Metal, mainly due to its ideology. So, why did you decide at a certain point in time to join a band as Gorgoroth, known for its explicit Satanic ideology, history of violence and explicit live shows?

I simply joined Gorgoroth because I was asked to help out on bass for a show in England in 1995. They had no bassist and Infernus was satisfied with my playing and headbanging on stage, so I continued for two years. Then I quit as I lost interest. I just wanted to play the bass, headbang live and make a difference and be a part of the force Gorgoroth was live. Personally, there wasn’t anything else in it for me.



AETERNUS – LET’S LOOK AHEAD

If I remember correctly, the CD-version of *“Beyond the Wandering Moon”* had a booklet that could be folded open as an upside down cross, which I never thought fitting for the band. How did that happen?

It wasn’t indeed, you’re right. Our new label at the time, also our first label, Hammerheart Records, wanted it done for the digipack so we felt we just had to go with that. Kinda like you know: “Okaaaay, sure whatever, you’re the boss!” thing. At that time, we felt we couldn’t oppose that much and at the time it was a bit cool. Though you’re right, Aeternus was and never will be Satanic or into any ideology of any sort.

You also joined Immortal for their *“Blizzard Beasts”* tour in 1998. This tour was among one of the first Black Metal gigs I attended (in venue De Jachthoorn in Denderhoutem), and the Immortal show already hooked me up with tinnitus at a young age. Do you have fond memories of this tour? How is your hearing after playing loud music for 30 years?

(Laughs) Sorry for your tinnitus sir. What can one do, but to use earplugs. I myself have slightly reduced hearing on the left side.....and sliiiiight low constant whizzing.

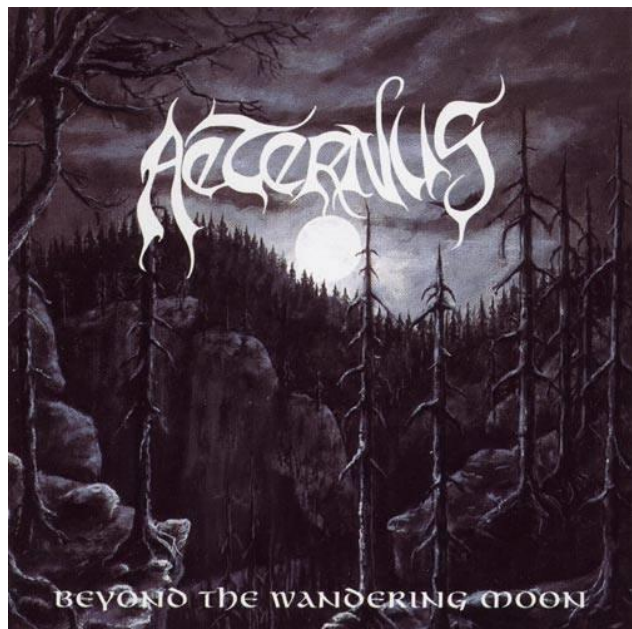
It was a fantastic honour to be asked to do bass for Immortal on that tour, I learned a lot and I had an amazing time. I was a fan being asked to help out doing session bass on a 3-week tour?? Come on!! What the fuck, right?? (laughs).

After having worked with Hammerheart Records from the Netherlands for several years, all records starting with *“A Darker Monument”* (2003) have been released on different labels with Polish Agonia Records being your current one. Did you sign a multiple record deal with them or do you prefer not to be bound to a label for a longer period anymore?

One album at a time is always the best.

During the past couple of years, Dutch Soulseller Records has been re-releasing *“Beyond the wandering moon”* and *“...And so the Night Became”*. A reissue of *“Dark Sorcery”* was the next one in line and was released in January. These reissues could have been a nice opportunity to include some liner notes with insights about how these records were shaped back in the days. Are you willing to share some fond memories about these legendary albums or are you not the type of nostalgic spirit that likes to look back ones in a while?

Hmmm, not very into going deeply into the past on those type of things. I made the music in my flat, putting it on cassettes, recording 3 tracks on to them using a 4 -track recorder of which one was broken. Then I presented the new shit to the band on these tapes, drinking coffee or beer on gatherings... They’d say what was cool or not. We then went to the rehearsal room with all of it and structured it all once we were all happy with these riffs and shit. It’s not that different today! Except for the cassette thing (laughs).



AETERNUS – LET’S LOOK AHEAD

I guess “...*And so the Night Became*” must have been a very pivotal release in Aeternus’ career as part of its cover artwork was tattooed on your chest a long time ago. What’s the meaning behind this sigil that was drawn by bass player Morrigan?

Yes, she drew this on my request. It’s basically the bands emblem or sigil yes. It holds what Aeternus is all about emotionally. Darkness, unity, magic, strength, might, power, etc.

Its epic opening track “*There’s no Wine like the Blood’s Crimson*” also contains some lines referring to your alias Ares. Are there many differences between the persona Ronny Brandt Hovland and his alter ego Ares?

Emotionally? Yes, tons of differences (laughs).

Do you have any side projects running at the moment? If so, any details you can share?

Nope, only Aeternus. Already working on new music.



Aeternus is the Latin word for ‘eternal’ or ‘never-ending’, but unfortunately all things must come to an end one day, although your musical legacy will of course live on forever. Do you think the expiration date for Aeternus is in sight or do you rather believe that the best is yet to come for the band?

Hmmm, as brutal as it sounds, Aeternus’ status as active will die when I die. Period. Or if I stop making music, but I won’t (laughs).

This interview was published on www.addergebroed.com on March 8 2024.