

KOLDBRANN – SHOW NO MERCY

After an almost decade-long period of dwelling in the shadows, Koldbrann returned with a series of select festival appearances in 2022/23. During these shows, the band premiered new material and proved that they were still full of cold grimness and misanthropy, completely devoid of compromise. After last year's 2-track 7" single "*Den 6. Massedød (Manna fra en annen himmel)*", their long-awaited fourth album, "*Ingen Skånsel*", was finally unleashed in August 2024. The album showcases a band that sounds rawer, harsher and better than ever. Vocalist/guitarist Mannevond shares some of his thoughts on the new album. (JOKKE)



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What made us wait so long for new music to arrive?

Yeah, it's been a long time coming! Well, it was a combination of different reasons - as it often is. We were quite active during the "*Vertigo*" years, up until 2014-2015, but then we went through a period of line-up changes and changes in the band's creative process. There were also a few years where I simply spent too much time in other bands. Djevel was getting busier and busier, recording several new albums. I was also involved with Nettlecarrier, and performing live with Faustcoven and Furze. Anyway, we never intended to rush the songwriting or to rush a recording with Koldbrann, just to release new stuff. Quality always comes first, so we took the time we needed - in every part of the process. Most of the songs were made and finished in the period of 2019-2021, but there are a few riffs and parts that date back to 2015-2018 - and a couple of riffs date back even longer. We recorded in the studio between 2021-2022, and the master was ready in Spring 2023. Of course, the decision to record a total of sixteen new tracks also added some time to the whole process. We could practically have made a double album - but the point was to record everything, and then choose what songs would work best on the album - and what songs would work better in other formats. We also wanted to release a single/EP before the album, like we traditionally do, with exclusive songs - sort of as a "taster" and to set the tone for the full-length.

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After more than 2 decades, Koldbrann still sounds full of cold grimness and misanthropy, and completely devoid of compromise. Are a no-compromises attitude and walking your own path some of the most important values for a Black Metal band?

They are definitely among the most important values for us. We have always gone our own way, never following trends or what others do. There certainly are enough “recipe” Black Metal bands out there.

What can you tell us about the new members that joined? What’s the biggest difference between the new line-up and the previous one?

The core of the band still consists of me, Kvass and Voidar, as it has been since the making of “*Vertigo*”. Kvass has been with me now since 2002 as an extremely important part of Koldbrann. He’s responsible for all our lyrics, and he served as our main songwriter up until “*Vertigo*”. Voidar joined in 2009, but he had already been working behind the scenes for quite some time. He recorded and mixed several of our releases, including our first demo and the debut album, together with Mr. NGZM. He also did much of the engineering on the new album - not to mention writing a few killer songs for both “*Vertigo*” and “*Ingen Skånse!*”!

After some years without a drummer, we were lucky to recruit the young and talented Leonid Melnikov in 2021, only a few months before we entered the studio with the new material. We had made elaborate demos of all the new songs by then, so things were pretty much laid out in advance, but he added his finesse and signature to the songs - and he gave a great performance in the studio. He’s a really skilled and technical drummer and now also plays with Nordjvel, among others. I can tell you he’s an absolute beast live!



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Lastly, I should also mention John Grave, aka Dragev. He was actually the original guitarist of Koldbrann, for a short while back in 2001. He rejoined in 2015, mainly serving as our live bassist, being a very vital part of our live performances, but he’s also contributing to the recordings, with some solos and guitars here and there.

As for songwriting, I am now the main songwriter. Then there are a few cuts by Voidar, one song by Kvass and one song by John Grave and me.

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The new album and its preceding single, *“Den 6. Massedød (Manna fra en annen Himmel)”*, are your first releases through Dark Essence Records. Can we consider this Norwegian label a better fit than Season of Mist Underground Activists that released *“Vertigo”* in 2013?

Well, for Koldbrann anno 2024, I would absolutely say so. We don't regret trying out Season of Mist at all, and they did a good job with *“Vertigo”*, but eventually it became evident that we were a small band on a big label. And of course, it didn't help that we took our time making a new album ... So, I reached out to Dark Essence in the early summer of 2023. We knew we weren't going to continue with Season of Mist, and I was mainly looking for a Norwegian label this time. Dark Essence had been on my radar for quite some time, and they seemed like a good fit for our size and style, so we listened around a bit and heard nothing but good words about them. They were really into our new material and offered us a fair deal, so that made it an easy choice. The co-operation has been very good so far, and we're eager to see what they can do for *“Ingen Skånsel”*.

“Vertigo” was a highly diverse and distinctive album, especially compared to the raw and cold sound of the debut, *“Nekrotisk Inkvisition”* (2003). The cover artwork and logo also showed a new development at the time. On *“Ingen skånsel”*, you seem to return more to your roots and back-to-basics approach of the debut and *“Moribund”* (2006). Was this an organic evolution or a well-thought-out decision?

First of all, I'm still very pleased with *“Vertigo”*. I still rank it as a very solid album with some really great songs. It definitely stands the test of time in my ears. But there's no need to do the same thing twice. This time, I wanted us to reach back to the primal and primitive. As mentioned, I'm now the main songwriter for the first time, so this new creative setting has influenced the music. You know, Kvass has traditionally been a bit more “sophisticated” and melodic in his music, whereas I have been more straightforward - more old school and primitive. And then we have Voidar, who's somewhere in the middle. So, yeah, it all came naturally. But that doesn't mean we might not explore other paths in the future. We have always aimed to be varied and dynamic in our music, and that was a key factor when arranging and putting together the songs for *“Ingen Skånsel”* as well.

The album title translates as ‘no mercy’, and the album cover shows a heavily damaged statue. Whose head has been severely damaged? And how does this historical figure relate to the album title or some of the lyrics?

The image of the damaged statue is a very strong symbol of ‘no mercy’. It portrays the desecration of something that might have existed for a very long time - the destruction of something valuable, meaningful or beautiful. And of course, the image of the broken face itself adds a lot to the atmosphere. The origin of the statue is of no importance, really - it's the symbolism and the image itself we were after.



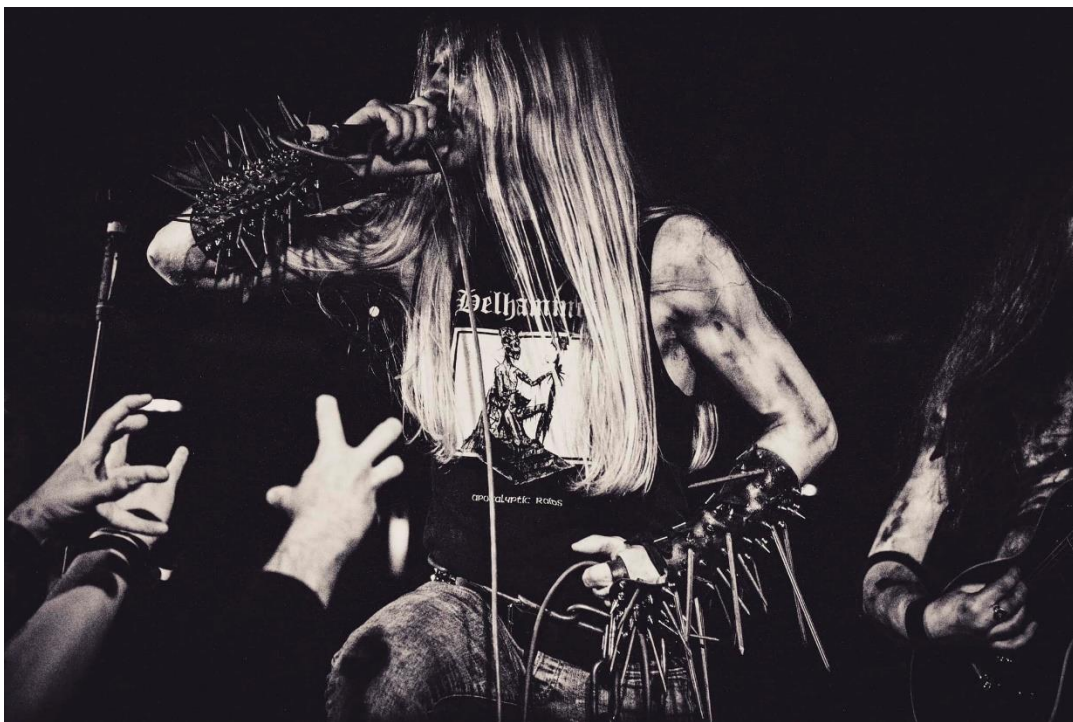
The sentiment of 'no mercy' is an attitude that has always had a strong presence in our music and our expression - and perhaps even more so on the new album, so we found it to be a fitting title, indeed.

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I must admit I was a bit intrigued to see The Cure doing something very similar on their new album cover when they announced it about a month after *“Ingen Skånsel”*. Of course, I don't think they know anything about Koldbrann, but I'll take it as a compliment regardless (laughs)! And I don't know about their new album, but *“Pornography”* from 1982 sure is a great one! What a way to open a record!

***“I Unaturens Vold”* was the first single to be released and translates to ‘In Unnature’s Grasp’. ‘Unnature’ is used here as a contrast, to point the finger at the fakeness and insincerity in people. It is one of the new songs that deals with standing tall on the outside, turning one's back on society and the world. Are fakeness and insincerity some of the diseases in today’s (Black) Metal scene?**

The lyrical concepts of *“Ingen Skånsel”* could roughly be divided into two categories. The first explores life on the fringes of the establishment, for better or worse ranging from tones of resignation, as heard in *“Prosesjon under Blyhimmel,”* to a sense of inner strength, as in *“I Unaturens Vold”*. The second category delves into annihilation and sheer terror, fittingly paired with the album's more crushing and aggressive tracks, such as *“Maskiner Av Nihil”* and *“Fortærer Av Minne Og Form”*. Finally, there's *“Et Uomtvistelig Falsum,”* an outlier that takes on a more existential and philosophical tone. The main idea is to have lyrics that push the boundaries of the Norwegian language in the context of Black Metal while still retaining its expressive power. Since only 0,07% of the world population speaks Norwegian, we have made sure to include English translations (made by Kvass himself) of all the album lyrics in the CD and vinyl booklets. We have also started publishing translations on our Instagram page. Anyone who's interested can then read and interpret the lyrics themselves.



The lyrics for the second single, *“Fortærer av Minne og Form”* (*“Devourer of Memory and Shape”*), are inspired by Roko's basilisk; the thought experiment about how a future all-powerful AI might seek to punish those who did not help it come into existence. Roko's basilisk has gained much of its notoriety by raising profound questions about the possibility of creating a truly moral and ethical artificial intelligence, as well as challenging humanity to consider the fundamental purpose of artificial intelligence in the first place. A topic that seems to be more relevant than ever, seeing how rapidly AI has been evolving in the past year(s). Being an artist, what's your take on using AI when creating music, artwork or writing?

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Creating music is something I value very highly in my life - whether it's making guitar riffs, bass lines, vocals or whatever. AI can obviously serve as a tool in many ways, but for me, it has no place in music. Then it's not making music ...

***"Elevert Hinsides Tilstand"* is a CD-only bonus track. Is it important to have some bonus material on CDs as sales of this medium have been crashing in the past couple of years?**

Nah, I don't think so. The thing is, I wanted the album to be within the original LP vinyl album length. You know, one LP with a maximum of 22-23 minutes of music on each side. But then I had this instrumental and atmospheric song that we couldn't include on the album, which I thought would fit perfectly as a kind of complimentary closing track, so I decided to add it as something special for the CD. I also thought it would be cool to add a small bonus for those who still prefer this format. I grew up with CDs myself, spending every 'krone' of my allowance when I first discovered Metal and Black Metal, and I'm glad we can still release our albums on CD.

Dark Essence Records' promo mail describes Koldbrann's music as appealing to fans of Darkthrone, Gorgoroth, Taake, Dødheimsgard, Craft, Urgehal, Tsjuder, Mysticum, Aura Noir, Beastcraft, Ved Buens Ende, Trelldom, Djevel, Whoredom Rife, Ildjarn and Leviathan. Quite the stretch in terms of sound, as, in my opinion, Mysticum and Ved Buens Ende or Whoredom Rife and Leviathan don't sound anything alike. Are there any specific influences for Koldbrann's specific take on the genre?

Well, I think that's the point, you know. Variation and dynamics have always been important to us. I don't want to have the same song twice on our albums, and we don't want to limit ourselves to only one style of Black Metal. We're inspired by a wide range of influences, including quite a few of the bands you mention – and of course, many more.

Do you plan to reissue the older albums in the near future?

Yeah, I think the time is right for that soon, now that we have released the new album. We do prefer to focus on new music rather than dwelling on the past, but the old albums really haven't been available on LP or CD in a long time.



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Koldbrann seems to be deeply rooted in the True Norwegian Black Metal tradition, a term that has been used steadily over the last couple of decades by bands as a kind of reaction against fellow countrymen who evolved in more commercial ways. In the early to mid-2000s, the term Nidrosian Black Metal also started to rise. According to its initiators, “Norwegian Black Metal” was not always a marker of quality, and therefore, they felt more comfortable narrowing it down to Nidrosia (Trondheim). Do you think Norwegian Black Metal is still as relevant as it was in the 90es?

We don't really care very much about all of this. It doesn't matter to us. We're doing our thing, and we're doing it for ourselves. We're not a part of any kind of scene. We clearly have our roots in Norwegian Black Metal, and that may very well be used to describe the basics of our sound, but we're certainly no “flag waivers”. We have also always had a lot of influences from abroad. Eastern Europe, South America, North America – all over. Anyway, if anyone wants to check out some newer Norwegian Black Metal bands, I would very much recommend listening to Tilintetgjort and Syn. They both released their debut albums in 2023. Killer stuff!

Koldbrann has been a notorious live band since the beginning, touring with bands such as Taake, Urgehal, Endstille, Marduk and Shining. You've made your mark on renowned festivals festivals such as Hellfest, Inferno, Party.San and Wacken. Does Koldbrann's real strength lay in live performances?

Live performances have always been an important aspect for us. We've done concerts since the very beginning, and it's still very rewarding. The energy you give the songs and the energy you get back is something truly special. “Pure black energy!”, to quote Tulus.

In October, you will perform in Istanbul. What do you expect from this show?

I've been lucky enough to have performed in Istanbul before, so I know that we can expect one of the most dedicated and passionate crowds. Black Metal is indeed alive in Istanbul. And it will be a pleasure to return with my own music this time - making Koldbrann's first performance in Turkey. Speaking of recommendations, check out Zifir from Turkey! Their last two albums, released by Einar Sjursø of Virus on his Duplicate label, are great stuff!



Why did you leave Djevel after “Ormer til armer, maane til hode” (2019)?

Well, like I mentioned at the beginning of the interview, there were a few years where I spent too much time in other bands. This is what dawned on me fully in 2020, when I realised I had to quit in Djevel. You know, Djevel got more and more busy over the years, as well. At first, we didn't play live, and I only did the bass, but then we started playing more and more live, and I also took over the vocals when Hjelvik left the band in 2017. Suddenly, Djevel demanded quite a lot of my time - especially at Ciekals' tempo of making new albums. Anyway, Koldbrann is what's most important to me, and I needed to prioritise to be able to use the time I wanted on Koldbrann. By then, I had also started making songs for Koldbrann again, and I wanted to put all my time into that. But there was no bad blood, and I actually continued to do the live bass for Djevel all the way up until my final performance at the Cosmic Void Festival in London.

To everyone's surprise, you were recently announced as the new vocalist for Craft, the longstanding Swedish Black Metal band. How did this collaboration come about, and is the band currently working on new music?

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I've had sporadic contact with Joakim of Craft since 2006. I remember he wrote us an e-mail, complementing us on our "Moribund" album. I had already been a huge fan of Craft for years, so that was of course very rewarding to hear. Fast forward to 2024 and I guess it was hard to say no when he asked so nicely... And yes, they have a new album ready.

Another new project you're part of is Jordsjuk, who have released the "Råtner på rot" EP so far. Is a full-length the next step for this outfit?

Yeah, Jordsjuk is something I have a very strong passion for. Renton has been one of my closest friends for many, many years. We've played together in several other bands, but we had never worked on new music together until now. We share many influences, and forming a band together was something we had talked about for years. In 2022, it finally came together when Renton made the first songs for what would become Jordsjuk. He's truly an excellent songwriter and riff maker, and I'm extremely pleased with the material. It's also great to do something somewhat outside of the pure Black Metal thing. And yeah, we have actually just finished our debut full-length - mastering and everything. The first single will probably be released a few months into 2025. Jordsjuk is definitely a band we will be prioritising, to put it like that.



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Throughout the years, you made quite a few guest appearances as a vocalist, also in live settings. Is it easy to convince you to lend your voice to another band's music, or does there have to be a certain kind of connection or personal relationship before doing so? Do you think all these guest appearances have slowed down Koldbrann in some way, as having released 4 full-lengths is not that much considering a 20+ year career?

I can understand you're asking, but yeah, there certainly has to be a special connection. I have turned down offers from a lot of bands, and most of them were "bigger" than Koldbrann, so it's definitely not about that. But yeah, I guess it's difficult to say "no" when some of your favourite bands or major influences ask you, like Craft or Furze - which I was also involved with briefly. There's no denying it has slowed down Koldbrann, so I have to find the right balance.

In Koldbrann's Facebook feed, I noticed a post where you have been showing support for the Danish band Afsky, whose frontman Ole was sporting a Koldbrann shirt during a live show. Lately, Afsky has been receiving quite a lot of controversial reactions due to Ole's attitude towards what's happening in the Middle East, the LGBTQIA+-movement, 'equality for all' and so on. Do you think there's a place for politics in music? Have you ever been a victim of cancel culture?

Afsky are great guys, and it was cool to see Ole wearing a Koldbrann shirt during one of their gigs, so we posted a photo of that and encouraged people to catch them live, as they were currently on tour through Norway. As for politics, Koldbrann is not a political band, so I'll just leave it at that.

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