

SOLFATARE – CONQUISTADORS OF THE USELESS

Emerging from the shadowed streets of Brussels, Solfatare is a band that marries the bleak elegance of traditional Black Metal with the cerebral intensity of avant-garde influences. Their debut album, *“Asservis par l’Espoir”*, is a meditation on despair, futility, and the human condition, delivered through a lens of poetic nihilism and philosophical rigor. Drawing inspiration from the Symbolists, the Cursed Poets, and the existential musings of Camus and Cioran, the band crafts a sound that is simultaneously abrasive and hypnotically intricate. In this interview, Solfatare delve into their creative process, the philosophical underpinnings of their work, and the personal and cultural influences that shape their music, offering a rare glimpse into a project where darkness and reflection intertwine with unflinching honesty. The full version of this interview that is twice as long will be featured in an upcoming physical release destined for 2026 (JOKKE) © Band picture: Oscar Swinks



Solfatare refers to a volcanic fume and a mythological gateway to the underworld. What led you to choose this name, and how does it reflect the spirit of the band?

The name was chosen after reading about supervolcanoes and how their eruptions could obliterate life on Earth. This would mainly be due to the ash clouds they produce, which could block the sun's rays and plunge the world into darkness. The Phlegraean Fields caught my interest because one of its past massive eruptions, around 40,000 BC – dubbed the Campanian Ignimbrite eruption – is thought to have caused significant climate disruption. It may also have impacted hominid migration in Western Europe. This caldera fascinated me because, despite still being relatively active, the suburbs of Naples are literally built on top of it.

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Within the Phlegraean Fields volcanic complex, one of the craters is called Solfatara (di Pozzuoli). It is currently the most active of the multiple volcanoes present in the region. It is characterised by constant fumarolic emissions and concerning episodes of bradyseism – movements of the ground surface. This toponym gave its name to the word “solfatare” in the French language, which in common usage now broadly designates any volcanic fumes heavily laden with sulphur.

From there, we thought we had already found a name with a strong background. By extension, for us this name also represents our internal turmoils, boiling within us and ready to burst forth.

The album title “Asservis par l’Espoir” translates as “Enslaved by Hope” and suggests that even hope itself is a form of imprisonment. Could you elaborate on what this paradox means to you?

We are and remain slaves as long as we are not cured of the habit of hope. Hope is what keeps human beings chained to their illusions, preventing revolt and the acceptance of the tragedy of existence. Hope is a trustful waiting – an almost certain fulfilment of a wish – a comforting certainty that leads us into oneiric constructs and unrealistic waking dreams. After all, “hope” was contained in the box Pandora opened, which released its calamities upon the Earth. That is self-explanatory in the very definition of hope.

Hope softens our sorrows and paints future pleasures in the colours of present delights. Destined to fail, it is only when Sisyphus stops hoping that he will reach the summit that he can finally be free.

Yet hope is inherent to the human condition. It is impossible to live without it; we always keep at least one, unwittingly.

The album explores the depths of existential anguish and plunges into humanity’s long-standing quest for meaning, only to find none. Can you elaborate a little further on the lyrical topics?

Life does not have intrinsic meaning; it is merely a prolonged agony, a preparation for death. This is probably the greatest truth, rendering the quenchless search for meaning an inanity. A cosmic coincidence, our lives amount to nothing. We are in the world for no reason. Yet instead of nonchalantly carrying our decay, we are afflicted by the bland obsession of being something. We toil endlessly to avoid facing the inevitable.

The album offers a relentless journey towards embracing misery as a reason to live, as profound experience lies only in despair. High on lucidity, it explores the feelings one may encounter when embracing suffering. It tears away the veil of blissful ignorance and finds ecstasy in total disillusionment.

The album touches on themes such as anhedonia, the awareness of meaninglessness, ineluctable decay, the silence of the universe and the Absurd. Armed with absolute lyricism and poetry, our album attempts to unravel beauty in the abyss.

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Black Metal has always had a philosophical dimension, from misanthropy to mysticism. Where does Solfatare position itself within that spectrum?

We have always liked to impose definitions on things; it helps us organise and tame chaos. If we must indulge in that exercise, we would say we lie at the intersection of Romanticism, Symbolism, pessimistic lyricism and Nihilism.

We stand far from the mystical side of the spectrum; we are too pragmatic for that. We would like to relate to something sacred, to connect with a form of spirituality, but we can only ever grasp at nothingness.



Solfatare casts a disillusioned gaze upon society, a vision steeped in estrangement and alienation. But misanthropy was not really a topic addressed in our album. Certainly, our lucidity regarding the absurdity and shallowness of the modern world leaves us unable to truly belong within it. Since then, we have been constantly torn, caught between the desire for connection and our incomprehension of the world. This conflict undoubtedly feeds the emotions explored in the album. But it is far too easy to wear the mask of misanthropy when we do not truly withdraw from the world as hermits shunning society.

It is worth mentioning that, despite the philosophical dimension of our work, we have no intention of conveying an active message. We are philosophers of the apocalypse, with nothing to offer. Our intentions are purely descriptive. As Conquistadors of the futile, setting foot upon unexplored shores and accursed banks, we document the strange arabesques etched by the vegetation looming before us, like a rebuke hurled toward the heavens. Grotesque contortions, mutilated and terrifying shapes – the plants themselves warn us of what we are about to uncover. Like Fitzcarraldo, we carry our music with us into the jungle, and it is up to the listener to decide whether anything within it resonates with them.

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The lyrics on “*Asservis par l’Espoir*” read like modern philosophical poetry: dense, visual and despairing. What inspired this particular mode of writing?

This style emerged naturally, shaped over time by reading the works of the Cursed Poets (poètes maudits) and the nineteenth-century Symbolists. Their ability to turn despair into something almost luminous taught me that darkness can be articulated with elegance, not just blunt force.

Guided by that tradition of writing, the inspiration for “*Asservis par l’Espoir*” came from everywhere. Yet it often began with a skewed observation of the world, an estrangement from society, and a personal sense of not quite fitting within it. The writing attempts to express this conflict through imagery rooted in Symbolism, but also tinged with the caustic cynicism that drips straight from Louis-Ferdinand Céline or Albert Caraco.

To illustrate this, we can dissect “*D’Hommes et d’Isoptères*”, the second track on the album, which opens with an apocalyptic, dizzying vision of a morning subway ride. It compares commuters to blind, toiling termites – those insects belonging to the order Isoptera – before shifting into a more metaphysical consideration of our condition.

Your use of French feels deliberate and elevated, almost liturgical even. Was writing in your native tongue essential to express the album’s depth of emotion and imagery?

Using French was an obvious choice. We are far more comfortable in our native tongue when it comes to conveying emotion and truly expressing and connecting with ourselves. English often feels dull or disconnected; you rarely find the exact words or phrasing you are searching for. English is too prevalent in culture in general. While it is crucial to speak it in the 21st century, its omnipresence in art and music drives an impoverishment that leads to total homogenisation of culture.

Therefore, there was a desire to preserve our language and to draw from an extended, nearly forgotten vocabulary – a kind of disused lexicon – in order to preserve something beautiful to which we are attached and to revive a certain form of Romanticism, without slipping into pomposity.

This should not be interpreted as a misplaced feeling of nationalism, patriotism, or cultural insularity, but rather as a futile yet affectionate exercise in preserving something we find beautiful. I can understand that at first it might represent a barrier to non-French speakers, but I am convinced that people can access emotions that are universal. I personally enjoy this extra intellectual exercise: trying to translate lyrics from non-English singing bands, or simply experiencing the musicality of other tongues.

The album artwork features Jean Delville’s “*L’Homme-Dieu*”, a painting steeped in mysticism and symbolism. What drew you to this particular work, and how does its vision of divine-human duality reflect the themes explored on “*Asservis par l’Espoir*”?

Jean Delville’s work has always resonated vividly in our imagination. In the library of the Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB), the university where I studied, one of Delville’s major

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works was on display – a depiction of Prometheus bringing the sacred fire of knowledge to humanity. That alone left a strong impression on me.

Delville's work is scattered throughout Brussels and across Belgium. Some of his mosaics adorn the exterior walls of the Cinquantenaire, the monument erected to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Belgium. Another of his major works, displayed at the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, was later used by Morbid Angel for the cover of *"Blessed Are the Sick"*.



When we started looking for a cover for our album, we stumbled across *"L'Homme-Dieu (The Man-God)"* and immediately felt it was the perfect match. We decided to use an excerpt rather than the full artwork, focusing on the humanity seeking elevation, surrounded by a sea of grimacing, entangled bodies.

In *"L'Homme-Dieu"*, Jean Delville depicts the individual in pursuit of spiritual and intellectual perfection, rising toward the divine through a path that unites the scientific study of nature, the search for universal harmony, and the exploration of esoteric mysteries. The painting

offers a symbolic vision of the human-as-symbol, capable of attaining a form of "divinity" through knowledge and harmony.

We like to think that this elevation toward divine harmony can only be achieved once we liberate ourselves from hope itself. The painting reflects the awareness of effort and the apparent insufficiency of human action. Like Sisyphus pushing his boulder, the Man-God rises toward the divine, aware of the limits and sufferings that surround him. Struggle becomes beauty, and effort becomes meaning.

Solfatare's live debut took place on October 17, during the tribute night for fallen brother Oscar Swinks, who died of cancer. You ended your setlist with a cover song of his band Herzog. During several of the sets I witnessed, emotions were tangible in the air. How do you look back on Oscar and how important was he for the Black Metal scene in Brussels?

First of all, thanks for joining us in paying a last tribute to Oscar. The night was, in a sense, magical, as it brought so many friends and emotions together on stage and in the crowd. It meant a lot to all of us. We would have hoped that our debut was for another occasion, but this was something Oscar wanted, and we were so glad to be able to say goodbye in our way – by playing live.

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Oscar was always very involved in the scene, being present at many shows as a spectator or photographer capturing diverse band performances. He was also involved for a long time in the stage decoration and management of many A Thousand Lost Civilizations (ATLC) gigs. Musically, he was always fooling around and playing here and there, but his most recent achievement was releasing his first album “*Furnace*” with Herzog. He was also involved live with Heinous. Few knew that he was actually working with Solfatare to take up the role of live guitarist. We were close to being ready when the disease caught him.



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But I think the tangible emotion doesn't only come from Oscar's involvement in the scene, but from the person he was and the impact he had on everybody around him. He was truly one of those few people who are deeply connected with others. Nothing about him was fake – he was always genuinely interested, kind and caring toward anyone crossing his path. He displayed such a positive mindset in the face of adversity, even until the end. He had the ability to turn every situation into something fun. I have been in a few tricky situations with him – being stuck on the highway with all our gear when my car engine broke down, driving six hours through a snowstorm to return from a Herzog gig, or having to rush him to the emergency room because he badly cut his finger. Where we would have been consumed by worry, he stayed untouched by it, turning every situation into something light, living fully in the moment, and cracking jokes as always. A true paragon of resilience.

Oscar was a close friend whose absence leaves a void. The courage he showed in the face of the disease he fought is a lasting lesson for us. As I personally played as his live guitarist in Herzog, and seeing his involvement in Solfatare, it made sense to include one of his songs in our live setlist that day.

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As mentioned, the path of the disciple he started to draw will continue through us. Solfatare's drummer, T.G.T.H., has now joined Herzog's ranks, and we will hit the stage at the next ATLC festival in Brussels in February 2026 to honour Oscar's legacy. Silence is due for now, but expect more to come.

Are you planning to play more shows?

Yes. Since then, we have already played other shows at Antwerp Music City and at MCP Apache with Masters Call and Necroritual from the UK.

Plans are starting to take shape for 2026, as we have also been confirmed for the ATLC festival in Brussels alongside many great names (Negative Plane, Mispyrming, Blasphemy, etc.). Mark the date.

More interesting announcements are to come, and we are working on playing our first shows abroad.

Is "*Asservis par l'Espoir*" a closed statement, or do you see it as the first chapter in a broader narrative?

This is clearly not the last chapter of our story, and we are definitely going to write more. For now, we are focusing on playing live and getting some action. But ideas have been brewing in the magma chamber.



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