

Gazpacho: True people of the night

Gazpacho. A band that has been working hard for quite a while, and takes a huge musical step forward with every new album. The latest album by these Norwegians, called "Night," is truly of a rare quality. The band was in the Netherlands, and performed a show in De Boerderij the night beforehand. An excellent opportunity for an interview. We had an extensive conversation with singer Jan H. Ohme, keyboardist Thomas Andersen, and guitarist Jon-Arne Vilbo.

Before we get the opportunity to pose the first question, we are given a copy of the new CD. So far, we have only had the album in MP3 format, so we immediately focused on the artwork. We immediately spot that there are no lyrics in the booklet. Why is that?

Thomas Andersen (TA): Often when we listen to an album, we try to interpret the lyrics by listening only to the lyrics. We would like people to do the same with this album. All the more because this album is about a dream. The lyrics are not about what's going on in the head of whoever wrote the lyrics, it's about the texts that surface in the listener's mind. If you don't print the lyrics in the booklet, you will leave a lot more to the imagination of the listener. And... There's more room for artwork. It's truly amazing what he (Antonio Seijas Cruz) created in his artwork, and how he interpreted the music and the lyrics in his work. We have the lyrics, and eventually, we will publish them on our website, but not for the coming half year or so.

Jan H. Ohme (JO): When Antonio showed us his artwork, the first thing I said was: "It'd be a shame to print lyrics on this." And those were just the sketches, and even those were amazing! I want the people to really listen to the music while looking at the artwork, thus forming an opinion of their own and interpreting the meaning of the lyrics, without being distracted by reading the lyrics.

We've been following you since your ep "Get it While it's Cold" and are quite well acquainted with all of your albums, and we have concluded that "Night" is your best effort ever, followed by "Bravo" and "When Earth Lets Go" and with "Firebird" as your least impressive album.

JO: It's funny you should say that. We hear that a lot. Many people consider "Firebird" to be our worst album, whereas in Norway, many people regard "Firebird" as our best album.

Why did you make this into a concept album? Is this something you had always wanted to do?

If you were to ask the entire band this, they'd all give you a different answer. Whenever we've finished an album, the question "There, now what will we be doing for our next album?" is asked. (Laughs) When we had finished "Firebird," we felt like "Let's do something with a concept now." At first, we were planning to make it a "secrets" album. We asked people to mail us their secrets anonymously, and we were planning to turn them into music. Things like "I was abused by my father during my entire childhood" or "I always cut the tyres of my brother's bike." And then, we wanted to turn that into a concept album. It didn't happen.

TA: We were criticised for that idea, people thought we couldn't think of our own ideas any more. The secrets that we got turned out to be very hard to translate into music.

JO: Our music has truly matured with "When Earth Lets Go," and though "Firebird" may not have been a huge step forward, it was a setup for "Night." After "Firebird," we could think in atmospheres rather than songs. Whether they last 4 minutes or 17 is irrelevant then. At first it was "Verse, verse, chorus, . Oh, we need another verse, guys," whereas now, we let the song write itself.

The music sounds beautifully dark.

TA: Yes, it sounds very depressed. (Laughs) That's typically Norwegian.

Jon-Arne Vilbo (JV): We're just totally misunderstood. This is our happiest album so far. (Hilarity ensues.)

JO: The other day, I heard the album through headphones. That really makes it an adventure. It's made for that as well. You hear so many things in the music that you just won't hear with background noise. You can't say "I'm going to give it a spin for 5 minutes and stop then," you have to experience the entire album and discover the deeper layers.

TA: When I first heard this album after its completion, I thought "Wow, this sounds amazingly dark." You have to listen to this album in the dark, with a glass of red wine, whilst looking at the moon. By the way, the song *Valerie's Friend* is about Valerie Solanis, the woman who shot Andy Warhol.

I'd already heard that the album was about sleep and dreams, and I looked up some things. Sleeping occurs in five stages. Firstly there's consciousness, then drowsiness, then a light sleep, then a deep sleep, and the extremely deep sleep (also known as REM-sleep.) These cycles repeat about five times a night. People also dream approximately five times a night. "Night" is divided in five pieces... Is this related?

[Silence]

JO: Wow! Did you know that?

TA: I knew that there are five stages of sleep, yes, but that's unrelated to "Night."

JV: That was really interesting!

TA: Yes, really cool. From now on, we'll answer that if people ask about it. (laughs)

JV: Yes, we'll destroy your recorder and use your theory from now on, it sounds much better.

I read on your site that you've used over 200 tracks, and have made over 1000 sound files. Did you keep writing the album, also after you started recording?

TA: Certainly. We started with a demo, and recorded around this, altering things all along the way. Eventually it will sound completely different from the demo. Mikael Kr mer (The band's violin player) was still working on the mix on New Year's Eve. Racket Records had set the deadline on January second, because of the Marillion weekend. I only slept for three hours that night, and then I went back to continue. I think we made the biggest soundfile ever in that way. And backing that up... Man! I was so scared. You'll probably know how important backups are. Nothing can go wrong there. The total file is something like 50 concerts of sound.

JO: We could hear the PC moaning during those backups. It was really too heavy for it!

TA: We listened to the complete piece after every bit of recording and changing, to see if it fit the overall atmosphere. If it didn't, we'd throw away that part and start over again.

JV: To keep everything interesting for the listener is really very hard. Especially when you have over 200 tracks. If only to remember who is who on which track and what part can be found where. At a given time, we were using colour codes. To keep everything apart. I know that some small things are missing in the final effort. Fortunately you won't hear that as an ordinary listener.

Has it never crossed your minds to make it a double album?

JV: That was originally the idea, but we just didn't have the time on our side. And it made us take a decision. Did we want everything in a single song, like we have now, or do we want to put more in there and make it a double album. In the end, we were all in favour of doing it like we did.

JO: At first, we were thinking we'd do "Night" plus six other songs as a double album, but we quickly agreed not to.

Altogether, it sounds like a very stressful and hard time. You're still together... So that's quite an effort.

JO: Yes, good, isn't it?

TA: I really have to show you something (He shows us several photo's on his mobile phone, of frustrated band members and hilarious pictures that were taken during the recording process.) Man, we even blew up a subwoofer in the studio. It sounded so cool we kept turning up the volume. Yes, that went somewhat wrong then.

On your latest album, the Marillion-influences (Especially those of "Marbles") are a lot larger than on your other albums. Is that because you've been spending a lot of time with them lately?

JV: No! Next question? (Laughs)

TA: There certainly are Marillion influences on "Night." Interesting is that I've hardly been listening to Marillion lately. A lot less than when I was young.

JV: I do see bits which resemble Marillion.

JO: At times, I've been jamming with Mikael, and trying stuff out, and he'd sometimes say "Wow, that sounds very Hogarth." So I asked whether he had a problem with this. This was not the case, he loved it! So we left it in.

TA: It's not bad to hear influences, is it?

JO: It's funny you should say it sounds more like Marillion because we've all been listening to Marillion a lot less, because we've been playing with them so often.

TA: We could really worry when Marillion influences could be heard in our work, but now, we're no longer bothered by it. We do our thing, and there will always be influences.