

## **SORCERER; interview with Kristian Niemann**

The Swedish Heavy Metal band, epic and heavy, SORCERER releases its fourth album "Reign of the Reaper" at the end of October. Formed in 1988, since their return in 2010, throughout these years they have forged and evolved to achieve their sound and a well-deserved place in the scene. On the occasion of their new release, we spoke with their guitarist Kristian Niemann, with whom we reviewed the history of the band and delved into their new work "Reign of the Reaper".

**Let's get to know the beginnings of the band a little better, for those who don't know you. Sorcerer began in the late 80s, after recording two demos, in 1992 the band ceased activity. What happened to make that break, and what made you come back in 2010 again?**

I wasn't in the band back in the 80s and 90s but I think what happened was that bassist Johnny Hagel joined Tiamat and the singer Anders Engberg joined Lions Share. Having the main songwriter and the lead singer leave the band tends to shut things down quite effectively. I have no idea what the other guys in the band were up to, if they even continued playing. Actually when Johnny got the question from Oliver who runs the Hammer Of Doom festival in Wurzburg back in 2010 to reform Sorcerer and do a one-off show there he tried to get in touch with the old members but he couldn't track them down. When he talked to Anders about this I think Anders just said it better to find some new musicians so they got me (we'd toured together in Therion by then and had become friends) and Ola Englund (The Haunted, Solar Guitars owner, super-famous Youtuber) and drummer Robert Iversen. We did two shows with that lineup and then Ola left to join Six Feet Under and we brought in current guitarist Peter Hallgren.

**With what philosophy and influences did Sorcerer start in 1988? What was your main idea?**

Can't say for sure, like I said I wasn't in the band then, but if I had to guess they wanted to make music in the style of their heroes back then; Candlemass, Rainbow and Dio-era Sabbath.

**"In The Shadow Of The Inverted Cross" in 2015 marked your return. How would you describe the musical approach of this album?**

Well, when Sorcerer reformed in 2010 there wasn't any talk of recording an album. We just did some shows and played the old material. However the reception we got at these shows, which were mainly festivals, was quite amazing and something we hadn't expected at all. People were singing along with every song and even knew the lyrics better than us. This put the idea into our minds that maybe we should try to write some new material because clearly there's an audience for us out there who might appreciate some new music.

Johnny wrote the riffs and I helped him arrange them into songs, and then we sent them off to Anders and co-producer/vocal coach Conny Welén to work on lyrics and melodies. Everybody was on the same page and had the same idea of what we wanted to do, and the songs came out really good. We aimed to capture the feel and atmosphere of those older

Sorcerer songs from the demos and we didn't want to bring in a whole bunch of new influences; it was a record we wrote for us but also for the fans. We sent the finished product out to a few labels not expecting anything but lo and behold, some of them actually were interested in signing us. Metal Blade was one of those labels and to be honest they were the ones we REALLY wanted to sign with. MBs output over the years speaks for itself and it's an honor for us to be working with them. They are such a cool label. When the record was released, surprisingly we got stellar reviews from almost everybody and our old fans seemed to really like it as well.

**Your next album "The Crowning Of The Fire King" had the most epic essence to date in the Sorcerer sound. How did it influence the evolution of the band's sound and direction?**

After the success of the previous album we set out to record an album that brought the "Sorcerer sound" into the new era so to speak. Where In The Shadow Of The Inverted Cross mostly was a continuation of those old demos from the 90s, Fire King was a statement of "This is what Sorcerer sounds like now". We didn't worry about sounding like the old stuff; we just wrote whatever we felt like would best represent Sorcerer in the now. It was the first album that had songwriting contributions from me and Peter as well as Johnny and it made for a pretty diverse-sounding record. For me it's in a way really the start of our recording career as it lays the foundation of everything we do now. It's heavy, it's got a massive amount of hooks and memorable parts and it's got a modern production. That's what Sorcerer is about even today: fat, heavy riffs, great grooves, strong melodic hooks, fantastic vocals, lots of shredding solos and a modern punchy production. We have no intention of sounding like it's 1984.

Anyway, It's always nerve-racking and terrifying writing music and having it judged by people, and it gets worse every time we do a new album, so because of the relative success of ....Inverted Cross, at least in artistic terms, we were a bit worried people might not appreciate this "new" Sorcerer sound. Luckily they really did and most people think it's the best album we've done so far.

**"Lamenting Of The Innocent" was a much more elaborate album, with more elaborate, longer songs. What can you tell us about the experience of creating a concept album?**

Lamenting was really just a continuation of Fire King but yes, the album is a bit longer (too long I think actually now in hindsight) - it's 63 minutes. I also think the tempos dropped a bit on that one. For the record I just want to say I don't think Sorcerer is a doom band. There is some of that influence, sure, but there are equal amounts of just pure heavy metal in our sound and also more modern stuff as well (mostly courtesy of me). Anyway I digress...

Lamenting builds on the work of Fire King and stretches it further into epic doom territory. More elaborate song structures, and a heavier/slower vibe overall. This album also featured new members Ricky Evensand on drums and Justin Biggs on bass which had quite an impact on the sound, at least from our point of view. With a drummer as good as Ricky there suddenly were no limits regarding what we could write musically because we knew he could pull it off and then some. The concept idea was hatched by Anders I believe and it's mostly in the lyrical department where he felt the story about the witch hunts in the 17th century would provide an excellent story on which to build sinister riffs, epic songs and spine-tingling

melodies. Justin is an excellent lyric writer and he and Anders collaborated to create these ten tales of sorrow, pain, fear and death. For me it's like a Halloween soundtrack (the time of year, not the movie); spooky and scary but also beautiful and magical.

**Although we will now comment on some songs from your new album "Reign Of The Reaper", at first listen, this work sounds darker and more aggressive than the previous ones. What can you tell us about him? How is it different from your previous works?**

Lots of intentional changes for this one actually. I would definitely agree with darker and more aggressive, and that's two things we set out to achieve. Also we wanted a more in-your-face, a more direct album. Shorter songs and a shorter runtime going back to when you had cassettes back when you were a kid (yes, we are old) you could fit an entire album on one side of a 90 min cassette. Perfect length. There are EXTREMELY few albums that are over 45 min long and all the songs are awesome. Usually there are plenty of fillers on there. We certainly didn't want any fillers on this album. The tempos overall are a bit faster and that comes from us trying to select songs for our live show and realizing we have too many slow numbers. We want a dynamic live experience and too many slow songs in the setlist makes for a boring show tbh. Like I said, we're not a doom band. This goes for our band only of course. I'm not saying doom bands are generally boring; Candlemass for sure aren't. Fantastic live act.

So yeah, the album builds on the foundation we created on Fire King but stretches it in a different direction compared to Lamenting. It's still Sorcerer; Anders is still singing his ass off, there are hooks and grooves galore, epic choruses, choirs, tons of cool guitars....we're not changing styles here. We're not going death metal or punk. Yet....

**"Morning Star" is the first single from "Reign Of The Reaper", as well as being the album's opener. A very heavy song, with a very powerful rhythm section, great guitar solos, with certain dark touches, that talks about the fall of Lucifer. Because you have chosen this song as the first single, do you think it is the one that best represents this album?**

We were toying with a few different ones as album openers, I think The Underworld was in the running for a while, but in the end we settled on Morning Star. It was chosen as the first single because it encompasses all elements of this album. Like I've mentioned its got the hooky chorus, great catchy riffs, fast parts, slow parts, awesome vocals and just a general epic vibe to it. It's got a little bit of everything in it so yes, it serves as a good introduction to the album as a whole, and lets be honest, how can you pass up an opportunity to praise Satan on your first single? That's right, you can't.

I wrote the riffs and music to this one and the opening melody I came up with while I was training in the gym. I did what I always do and sang the melody into my voice recorder on my phone and when we started writing the album I immediately felt that this one could be special. Anders and Conny came up with some killer vocal lines and slowly it morphed into the finished song. It had a very different chorus at first, a brutal one because I wanted to keep the energy up during that section but then the song became undynamic and it didn't feel right so we went with a different approach. The bouncy guitar melody which plays in the chorus underneath the vocals are very much inspired by The Edge from U2. Sacrilege, I

know but hey that dude is a master of coming up with cool stuff that fits the songs perfectly. I basically just ripped him off verbatim. I also want to mention the drumming. Ricky absolutely killed it on this song and he manages to keep the intensity needed for the track while not sacrificing the groove or overplaying but still injecting parts and fills that lifts the whole composition to another level. That dude can fking play.

**In my opinion, I think the album is fantastic! There are songs like "Reign Of The Reaper" itself that sound powerful and epic. I like that Black Sabbath influence that this song exudes, perhaps the densest and heaviest on the album. I also notice a certain Rainbow air in some guitar parts. One of my favorite songs.**

Thank you. I'm happy to hear that. I feel the same way about the album.

The song Reign Of The Reaper started with Johnny. He usually sends me or Peter his song ideas and we work together to turn them into finished songs. Reign he sent to me, although it was named Mystic Doom as a working title I believe, and I started working on it right away. I know we used his verse riff and then I think I came up with the chorus. He also had the bridge and the pianopart so I built the riffs around that to create a spooky vibe for lack of a better term. I tried to make that section a marriage between King Diamond and Queensryche, and then Anders and Conny came up with those choir parts that fit so perfectly there. This song is definitely the result of a true collaboration between Johnny, Anders, Conny (our longtime collaborator and co-producer), Justin who helped finish the lyrics, and me.

**This song gives the album its title, tell me its connection with the cover and the set of songs on "Reign Of The Reaper"?**

We had a few ideas for the album art, none of them 100% perfect, so when Anders found this image by Joakim Ericsson online we all agreed that it had to be the cover. It's so badass. Before we found it we had actually decided that the album would be called Thy Kingdom Will Come and we tried to find an image that described that title, but when we saw this new image with the well-known figure with his scythe on a horse we felt the title Reign Of The Reaper would fit so much better.

**"Curse Of Medusa" is another of the singles. A song in which we can hear Arabic influences, with those choruses and powerful choruses already characteristic of Sorcerer.**

Medusa is the other song on this album that started with Johnny. He brought in the verse riff and I think I wrote the rest of the music. I don't actually know where the Arabic influence came from but it seemed to fit well in this track. I think I tried a bunch of melodic ideas and this just fit the bill. I think what also contributes to that arabian feel is the violin that plays the main melody in unison with the guitar line, which also plays octaves. That's quite typical for music from that region. It's a real banger of a track and would be great fun to play live if we decide to do that.

**One of the things I like is the ability to create songs as "different" as, for example, Thy Kingdom Will Come, with a much heavier sound, or Unveiling Blasphemy, heavier and**

**doom, and that the album as a whole remains dynamic, that as a whole maintain that expectation until the end. How do you work when composing?**

Thanks for noticing that. We really aimed this time to create a dynamic album that would be interesting to listen to more than once. I look for that myself in albums; I don't want to hear 10 songs that all sound the same. That's boring. My favorite albums all have that diversity and dynamic element to them. The simple answer concerning Thy Kingdom Will Come vs. Unveiling Blasphemy is that I wrote Kingdom and Peter wrote Unveiling. We have very different styles as writers; I'm more maybe about finding that one cool simple riff and building up to that BIG hooky chorus, while Peter tends to write more complex, intricate stuff. More progressive if you will. His songs tend to have more parts than mine also. I think this is what makes Sorcerer special; together with Johnny we have three strong but very different writers which perhaps automatically gives us more diversity. In terms of "heavy" that word can mean different things to different people and for me the heaviness of Kingdom for example comes in the chorus riff. That's my seven-string guitar playing that low C but it's not really that note per se that gives it heaviness; it's the fact that the rest of the song is riffing in A thereby creating the contrast that when I do go to that low C it's heavy as fk.

The simple answer regarding how we compose is we write songs now only to satisfy ourselves and then we choose the 8-9 best ones that together make a great, interesting and dynamic album.

**What are your expectations for "Reign Of The Reaper" and how do you hope it will be received among your fans?**

I hope they will love it as much as we do of course. That they see all the things you mention as strengths rather than weaknesses. I also hope it will do well commercially so that we can go out and play more shows. That's really where the fun lies, at least for me.

It would also be cool if more people than just Sorcerer fans got a chance to hear it.

**How do you think SORCERER's sound has evolved since their comeback in 2010 until "Reign Of The Reaper"?**

We have taken the initial epic doom sound of early Sorcerer and mixed it up with a bunch of new and old influences to create what we sound like today. Like I've mentioned already the core elements of our sound will always be there but how we present them will change from record to record as we get better as writers and performers.

**With a month left until the release of "Reign Of The Reaper", what are Sorcerer's immediate and long-term plans?**

Gigs and tours. First up is Hammer Of Doom in Wurzburg on Nov 17th and then we have shows coming up for 2024. Keep your eyes peeled on our FB page for all the news regarding that.

**Finally, what would you say to your followers, and those who still don't know you, about "Reign Of The Reaper"?**

A massive thanks to everybody out there who supports us by buying our records, buying our merch and coming to see our shows. Without you there simply would be no way for us to keep doing this. Words cannot explain how grateful we are for this opportunity.

**Thanks for your time and congratulations for “Reign Of The Reaper”.**

Thank you! Great questions my friend.