

current issue features:
interviews with lonesummer, owlscry, wrnlrd, and vattnet
viskar
feature on cobalt
reviews of many things

next issue forthcoming

e-mail blackmetalloftheamericas@gmail.com if you
require vol. 1

BLACK METAL OF THE AMERICAS
VOL. 2



april 24, 2012

welcome back.

last issue was a start, but by no means exhaustive, or a finished statement. we have much more to say, and to examine.

in this issue, we talk to a number of different dots on the black metal spectrum. vattnet viskar, environmentalists from small town new hampshire, provide a look at the new face of black metal. young and clean-faced, their brand of expansive and mature black metal belies their years. outsider in a scene of outsiders, wrnlrd offers a behind the scenes look at his unique music, and his creative process. lonesummer offers a humble perspective on his music, and a blistering critique of elitist attitudes. finally, we offer the first ever interview with milwaukee's owlscry.

patrick supplies another one of his band features, focusing this time on cobalt. all of the photography in this issue is credited to patrick as well, except for the pictures in the wrnlrd interview. those were provided by the artist in question. there are more reviews.

thank you for reading.

evolve or die.

hail.

ed & patrick

The Whispers of Nature: an Interview with Nick of Vattnet Viskar

Full disclosure. Nick and I grew up in the same small New Hampshire town. We were friends throughout middle school, and drifted apart in the social hell that was small town high school. Getting to reconnect was really great, and I'm glad to see him making good. -ed.

Can you talk about the formation of the band? What drew you all to black metal? How'd you meet?

Well Chris and I had known each other for years through bands we had been in previously. We were among the few of our friends that really liked black/extreme metal, so we decided to write a bit and see what happened. Then it just kind of took on a life of it's own, Matt and Alan joined up and before we knew it we were playing a few shows. After a few months of playing together we could all sort of feel where it was going musically, and that focus or whatever you want to call it really helped us. We just started working our asses off, just trying to get the music to anyone that would listen to it.

The theme of the natural world has long been a part of black metal. What do you think makes New Hampshire uniquely influential on your music, as opposed to the Pacific Northwest or whathaveyou?

I think whatever surrounds you is definitely going to reflect in your music, whether you intend it to or not. I've only been to the Pacific Northwest once, but I can completely see/feel the influence on bands like WITTR. Personally the specific area we live in gives a lot of inspiration. You can drive 10 minutes north and be completely in the woods, and 10 minutes south and you're in very urban Massachusetts. This sort of contrast between city and nature, technology and simplicity, is a constant mental struggle for me, but it's a basis for a lot of ideas.

How the fuck is an Inquisition show happening in Keene?

Haha that's what I was thinking when we first got the offer, but there are a couple of good promoters out that way right now. I've been seeing some pretty good shows out there lately.

In the recent interview with Pitchfork, Chris talked about this lyrical idea of "a cult gathering around a body of water that summoned its dissenters to drown themselves." Can you talk about the inspiration behind that idea, and maybe discuss how it relates to your musical output?

This was a pretty early idea. Lyrically I was thinking something about the fear organized religions almost always have of any outside idea, anything that may conflict with their doctrine in the tiniest way. So I got this picture in my head of a cult-like religious group sentencing someone to death by drowning, as a punishment for free thinking. Typical black metal fare for sure, but that doesn't bother us. This is also where the band name came from, the last lyrics of that song are "hör vattnet viskar", or "hear the water whisper", referring to the point of view of the person drowning. I wouldn't say that specifically carries over into the rest of the music really.

Chris also mentioned that you guys sort of stand alone in the New England scene, being perhaps "too hip" for the metal kids, and "too metal" for the hip kids. With the recent signing of Deafhaven to Deathwish, and NPR streaming Agalloch records, do you see black metal as becoming more of a crossover genre, leading to more widespread acceptance?

In a way definitely. I don't think it will ever be as big as death core is right now or something like that, but I've heard so many times "I'm not really a big black metal fan, but Deafheaven is awesome!" or something similar. This sub-genre or whatever you want to call it is definitely growing fast, and definitely has more widespread appeal than "trve cvlt" black metal though. Part of that that can't be ignored is the fact that it doesn't seem like any of these bands are trying to keep it super underground and exclusive like early black metal was.

Every time I visit Plaistow, there's a new big-box chain store, or an expanded road, or new sub-division. Was it this kind of urbanization that led to your interest in environmentalism?

I know, right? So many people have this picture of NH as all woods and log cabins, but that's so far from the truth. Speaking for myself, it's just been an ongoing process of learning about the things we do everyday affecting the world more than we know. Definitely wasn't an overnight thing. I don't want to speak for everyone in the band on this, but I think we're of a similar mindset here. Plenty of people would argue this, but I think just making an effort is huge. Do what you realistically can, y'know?

What's on the horizon for Vattnet Viskar? Full-length? Longer touring?

We're taking time to work on new stuff right now, still playing shows here and there. Chances are we'll try to get on the road again later this year or early next year. We'd definitely like to be out further and for longer.

Vattnet Viskar JUST signed to Century Records, and have both their Demo and their recent EP on Bandcamp. Check out <http://vattnetviskar.bandcamp.com/> for more.

Lost in Milwaukee: An Interview with Owlscry

Owlscry was a band I discovered through the fine work happening over at The Inarguable (<http://www.theinarguable.com/>), and quickly fell in love with. Their combination of Peste Noire-vocal variety and musical experimentalism quickly endeared them to me, and here we are with an interview. This is their first interview, I've been told. -ed.

Can you talk a bit about the formation of Owlscry, and the intent behind the project?

Owlscry was formed in May 2009 by Jeremiah, Joe, and myself. We had a bassist by the name of Beau, who was a part of the band from Nov.2009 up until he had to take off in Feb.2010. Immediately after he was replaced by Jason who is still with Owlscry, although now Joe and Jeremiah have gone off to pursue other things.

I have a few things to address before I delve into our intentions. Firstly, we are not a DSBM band, at least not in my book. Second, we have nothing to do with owls. And, lastly, there is no Anti-religious or any sort of "political" points of view, within Owlscry.

We like to avoid cliches and stereotypes whenever we can. Our main goals are to make the kind of music we enjoy listening to, as well as play. And, To do things our way, in order to make something that accurately portrays us as people and as artists. Something truly real and genuine.

The overall theme and idea of Owlscry is surreal and abstract, esoteric and occult. Presentation and interpretation all rolled together creating a seemingly endless spiral of symbolism and meaning. Everything becoming more and more complex as you wander deeper into the psychological vortex...in Owlscry nothing is ever what it seems to be.

I would go on more, but I feel as though this provides enough of a basis for understanding us at some sort of ground level. I'd be lying if I said that it doesn't go deeper. But, Our intentions are many, and the vast array of meanings and interpretations seem endless at times, even to me.

Owlscry's recent self-titled release was recorded in 2010, and was just released this February. Why did it take so long for those songs to see the light of day? Here's what I'll tell you. We wrote all the material between May'09 and August'10. Along the way certain songs didn't make the cut, recorded or not. We stopped once we felt we had the collection of songs we wanted to make up our Full-length. Then, Recording took place between Nov'10 to Feb'11. However, there are a bunch of grimy details about the recording process that I am going to leave out, and that's

that. All I will say is it was a very unpleasant and negative experience and we'll be doing all recording ourselves from now on.

The influence of place on black metal has always been part of the mythos. How does calling Milwaukee your home influence your sound?

It's an interesting place, very urban and industrial. And, it seems as though conditions in all forms fluxuate from one extreme to the other. Everything from places, people and weather. It's like, once you have adjusted to something, you are thrown a total curve ball, and are forced to recalibrate in order to accomodate. Milwaukee is full of opposing forces somehow working in balance to create stability in an otherwise topsy-turvy environment.

Wisconsin seems to have a vibrant and diverse metal scene, ranging from Gilead Media to Halo of Flies, from Enabler to yourself. Would you consider this assessment true, and if so, do you feel part of this scene?

Since I felt it was called for, I consulted Jason on this question. In my opinion, he plays a pivotal role in the scene and I feel as though he will have more valuable input on this question than I....

Jason -

To call it one scene would be lying. While we have many different varieties of metal bands (a decent chunk of which are either noteworthy and/or good), they all kind of fall into different areas. The two prominent areas of this would be what we call the bar metal scene and the DIY metal scene. There are definitely different ways to split it up and other smaller scenes, but the most general you could get is through this.

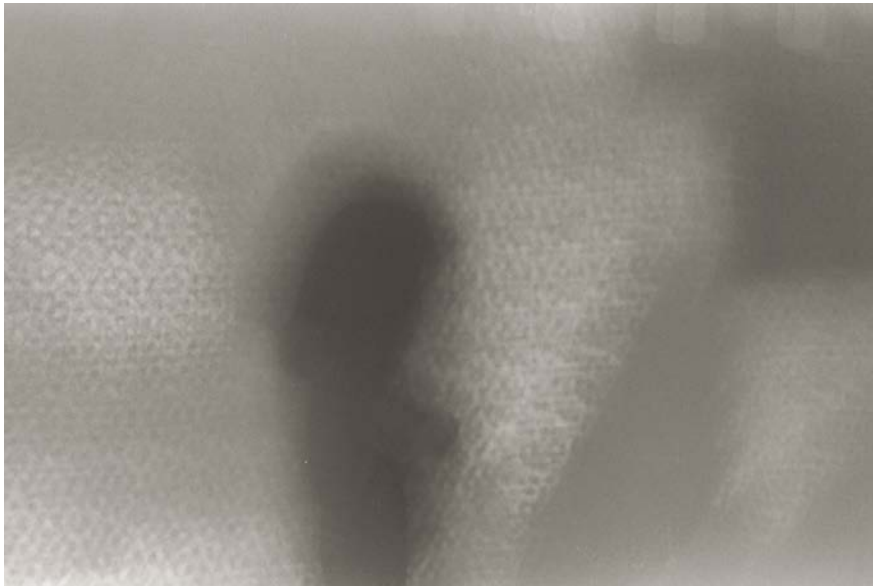
Owlscry definitely has many connections to each of these two major metal scenes, we do not necessarily identify with them. Maybe to a degree we identify with the DIY metal scene, but we feel more aligned with the noise scene going on here, especially in Milwaukee and a bit in other Midwest noise hot spots. Our first show was amongst the flourishing noise scene, and since then we have played many other noise shows (including two noise sets at the yearly Milwaukee Noise Fest, as well as an unusual collaboration with a friend at the same fest).

We've also put out a tape on a primarily noise label (Denton, TX based Dead Medium) and are planning on putting out a cassette version of the album on another noise label (Grand Rapids, MI based Black House) once the album is released on CD for a while. Our connections with noise go very deep mainly due to a shared feel in aesthetic and passion for sound and the avant garde, which the majority of the metal bands around here (and in general) lack.

In January, you stated that you were putting together a new line-up. Has that solidified? What's on the horizon for Owlscry?

We've only recently gotten the gears going again, but we're working on things. I would definitely say that we'll be back before the year is over (maybe noise fest?). But, like life, things change. As people change in a great many regards throughout life, and Owlscry changes with us. Constant change was all part of the idea in the first place. As for what's to come, I would say look for us to embrace other parts of our personality and for our association with the noise scene to play a definite role in our future endeavors.

<http://owlscry.bandcamp.com/> for more info



To Make Things Good Again: An Interview with
Lonesummer

Things I wrote about the last lonesummer release: "Lonesummer figured out that Leviathan and Saetia are pretty much the same thing, and wrote a bedroom masterpiece. Throw in GYBE!'s obsession with the end times, make it tremendously personal, and you've got the all time greatest staring-out-the-train-window album." Yeah. It's a really great album. -ed.

Can you tell us a little bit about yourself, and the impetus for starting Lonesummer? Has that motivating force changed as the project went on?

I don't really have much to say about myself. Lonesummer started in 2008 when I was living in Chicago. It was originally started under a different name, but only a handful of people have heard those recordings, and I've made sure they haven't surfaced (they really suck). I think over the years Lonesummer has evolved to become what I wanted it to sound like from the beginning. It just took a while and lots of experimenting.

Your last album " There Are Few Tomorrows for Feeding Our Worries" opens with numerous samples from the 2005 film "Stay". This seems like a deliberate reference to the mid-00's 'screamo' scene, and one of the many genre nods throughout the disc. Can you speak about your influences, both musically and thematically, especially in regards to the most recent album?

Since beginning Lonesummer, my influences and interests in music have constantly changed. I honestly don't really listen to much black metal these days, and I think the newer material sort of reflects that. Music is subjective, so I feel that one will hear different influences depending on who they are.

I listen to a lot of screamo, and I can see where some of that may have rubbed off onto the songs. I was listening to a lot of pg 99, The Saddest Landscape, Suis la

Lune, Beau Navire, Carissa's Wierd, Infest, Perfume Genius, Xiu Xiu and Spazz around the times I recorded that album.

But my writing process is everything but deliberate. I don't really go into songwriting wanting it to "sound like" anything in particular. I'm really not a good musician, and just kinda dick around with ideas until something works. I've always enjoyed the use of samples in music, and feel that often they provide added emotion to a song, if used correctly. So those samples weren't necessarily a deliberate nod to any type of sound.

Lonesummer has traditionally a bedroom project, until your split with Trist. On that release, you re-recorded a number of older songs in a studio setting. Is this an experiment that you'd consider a success, and will later recordings see you returning to a studio?

Being able to figure out a time and date for Thom and James (live/session members), Rich (the guy whose basement we recorded in) and myself that worked with our schedules was an absolute nightmare. The artwork and everything for that split had been finished before we even got to record! It made me realize another reason why I cherish home/solo recording. But when we got around to doing it, I was so happy with the final product that it kind of outweighed all the negatives. We've talked about writing material together, which I'd love to do. Thom and James both come from different musical backgrounds and have so much to add to the music.

You've spoken before about the general pomposity of the majority of the black metal scene. Is this still something you see now, even with the rise of so-called "hipster black metal", and the gradual movement away from corpse-paint and Satan, to more modern/urban influences? Is this also why you've distanced yourself from the black metal label, or do you just no longer considerate it an accurate description of your music?

Oh god, I could write pages about this. Black metal is an interesting scene, in that the image of a band matters almost as much as the music itself. It's a genre with a FUCK OFF AND DIE attitude but at the same time being hyper-judgmental of themselves and others in the scene. Black metal itself is the most pretentious and elitist genre to begin with! Is a Hunter Hunt Hendrix interview more pretentious than the average black metal interviewee claiming his music is "is conceptually more connected with nature and the Nordic soil, yet Black Metal in it's true essence" or "It symbolizes the creative and destructive essence of Satan and the homodeus"? Grown men in makeup laughing at Liturgy for "looking stupid", and deciding they hate the music based off an interview or a philosophy. Is his "Transcendental" theory any worse than the concepts Deathspell Omega uses? Oh wait, I forgot they're "hipster" too.

The word "hipster" means ABSOLUTELY NOTHING these days. I've talked with musicians labeled "hipster black metal" that are into far more underground, "necro" black metal than your average corpsepainted mongoloid. But because they dress like a "normal" person, they're discounted. I've seen almost every single black metal band in the past 5 years referred to as "hipster". It means nothing. The movement away from corpsepaint/blastbeat/Satan in black metal is the best thing that has happened to the genre. Black metal is such a great sound that can be experimented with infinite possibilities. I think people are finally getting tired of black metal that hasn't progressed in 20 years, and I'm really thankful for that. I've distanced myself from the label "black metal", because I don't think it really has ever accurately described the way I felt about my own music. Besides, the only black metal I really listen to anymore is Liturgy, Deafheaven, and Clair Cassis.

What made you decide to jump from Starlight Temple Society/Khrysanthoney to Music Ruins Lives?

Khrysanthoney/STS didn't really seem interested in the musical path Lonesummer was taking, and I was feeling stifled. Thom runs Music Ruins Lives and the first release he put out was between Lonesummer and his project,

Planning for Burial. So it was only natural for me to stick with that label. That isn't to say I have any ill will towards STS, as Wilhelm was the first one to really put Lonesummer out there. It was just more of an unspoken agreement that we were done working together.

Any plans to tour at all, like, say, oh, Chicago? (we have a vested interest in chicago dates - ed.) Or anywhere in the midwest, really?

I'd love to! However, it would be hard to do an extended Lonesummer tour, since the others are always busy with work/other bands (I mean technically I am too, but I want to put the blame on them, not me). I play drums in a powerviolence/black metal band, Angelcrust, that is doing a summer tour that may have a Chicago date, however.

What should we expect from Lonesummer in 2012?

To be completely honest, I haven't the slightest idea what the future holds for Lonesummer. You may have heard the final Lonesummer album. I haven't written a song since October, and rarely pick up the guitar. I think I may take some time off from writing new stuff for a while. I'd love to keep playing shows, but it gets difficult with everyone's schedules. We are playing a show with Deafheaven and Alcest on March 30th, that I'm really excited about. We're good friends with the Deafheaven boys, and Alcest has always been a big inspiration, so it's going to be a great time. With most of my musical energy being put into Angelcrust right now, pertaining to the future of Lonesummer, your guess is as good as mine.

Lonesummer's music can be found at:
<http://lonesummer.bandcamp.com/>

Lost in America: An interview with

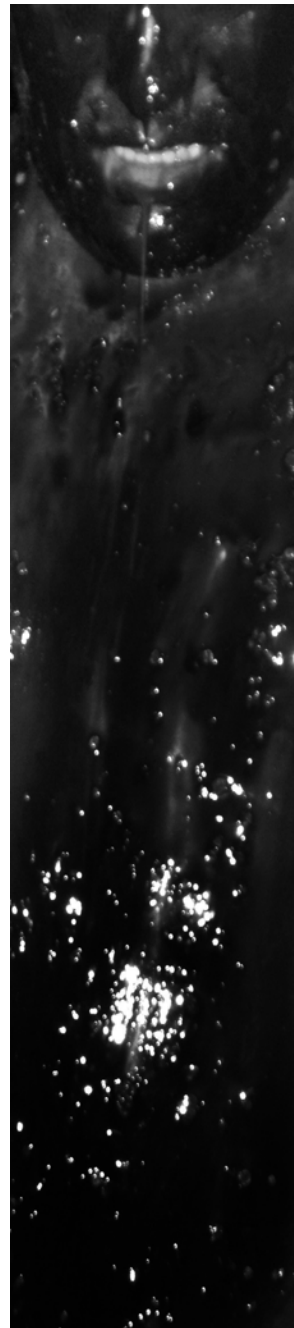
Wrnlrd

First off, how is Wrnlrd actually pronounced? Is it intended to be uttered?

Language can make a thing seem impossible when it is actually all around you. You don't recognize it because you are seeing with the language and believing in the words too much. In the beginning I decided rather than borrowing the power of an existing word, I would make the name to be a creature that borrows the appearance of a word. It is meant to operate the way the music operates. There is a suggestion of meaning, memory is activated, associations made, but these are never frozen. In this way many things can exist at once, from many different places and times. That's how we work, and how the music works also.

Many people discovered your music through the 6th release 'Oneiromantical War' on Flingco Sound System. Did you take a different approach on that release? How did the reception shape your approach from then on?

The earlier self released albums were reviewed by Aversionline, and those reviews are really what got everything moving. Soon we got an offer from Bruce at FSS to release an LP. We recorded Oneiromantical War and Pentagon at the same time, and released Pentagon in a small cd edition on our own label. Each album sounds the way it needs to sound as best as we could make it at that time. For the FSS record I really wanted to sum up all that came before, and take it further. There was some pressure to deliver something special because it would be the label's first release, and I was honored to be asked to do that. It made it much easier for me to intensify everything that I had been doing up to that point, make it more focused. But once the work really got going, it was like any of the other albums. Easy to get lost in, life of its own.



From some of the song titles on the 7th album 'Myrmidon', one could assume the album is about the opposite sex/relationships. This is quite an uncommon subject in the world of 'extreme music'. Is that a fair assumption, and if not, could you discuss the thematic qualities of that album?

The lyrics go into this more in depth, and those are included with the LP. All of our albums deal with many things at once, where we find a way to see them all as one thing. In one dimension, its about a girl who lost her man. An old story from rock n roll. She wants to follow him, bring him back to life. In another dimension its about a man who wants to be a woman, who is a woman in a man's body. It's also about the relationship between a man and his God. In Myrmidon, all of these things unfold together, become the same thing. The girl who grieves for her dead man is also the man who grieves for the girl he would become but cannot. They are both the worshipper who longs to touch the hem of his God's garment. They are tormented by the impossibility of their dreams. This drives them to try and do seemingly impossible things, to prove they are possible.

I started by taking all these small moments from certain Shangri-Las tunes that have always set me off, and I just blew them up, expanded them, made my own melodrama happen inside them. "Dressed In Black" started to sound less like a gloomy teenage love song and more about a girl who is being stalked by a dead boy. I ran with that

in my own way. There is one lyric in "Leader Of The Pack" where one of the girls asks Mary "Is he tall?" and she says "I gotta look up." That always knocked me out. How she measures this guy in terms of his effect on her, physically. This is why they put God in the sky. You have to look up to see how small you are. In those old Shangri-Las songs, the love was not innocent, or easy. It was about crucifixion.

I just kept imagining switching roles with Mary Weiss in those songs, where I am the one looking up at her. Where she was the one who died on that motorcycle. It took on a religious feeling. I had all kinds of delusions. When we recorded "Black Dress" I really felt like I was singing from inside Mary's ghost, like a ventriloquist. During that part in the middle where the horns come in? Even though the real Mary is not dead. She's still singing, playing shows today. But it was like the ghost of the girl she once was in those old songs, singing with my voice. Man I got worked up. It was incredible. I think I really went insane for short periods of time. Its all in the lyrics.

Black metal has always been a rebellious genre marred with an overbearing sense of orthodoxy. I can't think of a more obvious fuck you than incorporating influences from 1960's girl groups. Can you talk about the influence of femininity in your music, especially your more recent work?

I don't think of our music as a fuck you to any genre. I am not oppressed or persecuted by orthodoxy, or rebelling against this. Each album is about something specific, and the music reflects that. The influence of The Shangri-Las on the Myrmidon album was specific to the themes of that album. It was a true expression of something I still do not fully understand in a conscious way, and would prefer never to pin down rationally. The music is a way to study these obsessions without killing them. It was not just something we did to be snotty.

I don't think Myrmidon would have been possible without Buccinator singing. She brought everything to my own fantasies that I could never bring to them myself. It was another instance where we felt like there were other voices speaking through us. She could sing my words out of her mouth and somehow make me the puppet. I found myself trying to sing like her. That it was physically

impossible didn't matter. The way we all worked together reflected the melodrama of the album, from her singing to the guitar parts Iksnis played. Halfway through the recording I started to forget who did what. We lost ourselves in it that way.

Dwid from Integrity contributed vocals to Death Drive. His obsession with the darker side of the American dream ("Holy Terror", Manson, etc.) seems a perfect fit for a release focused on the murderous capacity of the automobile, a powerful metaphor of the American lust for success and power and the resulting tragedies associated. How did you convince him to be a part of that project? Did you ever work directly together, or were his contributions remotely recorded and spliced together in the studio?

I asked Dwid to do vocals for Moonlight Ride, and he said yes. Again I owe it to Andrew of Aversionline, who put me in touch with him. I sent him the music and lyrics, and he sent the vocals to me later. It meant a lot to me to have Dwid's involvement. It adds a lot to the drama portrayed in that release, as he was able to voice the part of the dead Johnny after the events of "Leader Of The Pack", where Johnny descends to the underworld.

Was the novel "Crash" by J.G. Ballard an influence on Death Drive at all, or just a case of thematic similarity?

Not consciously but looking back I'm sure we owe a lot to the idea of reenacting old Hollywood car crashes. Besides the Shangri-Las, some direct influences were Robert Mitchum's Thunder Road, Persephone and Hades, Orpheus and Eurydice, the abduction of Betty and Barney Hill, and Samhain's Kiss Of Steel.

The photos (and video) released with Death Drive show a man covered in an oil-like substance, which seem to reference our dependence on petroleum, but also conjures the traditions of corpsepaint and blackface. Given your previous mentions of connections between the two (see: http://www.thelefthandpath.com/lefthandpath/index.cfm/event/read/entry/Interview_Wrn1rd), this invocation seems deliberate. Can you discuss this aesthetic choice?

Yeah, it was a deliberate choice to suggest both of these, a being covered in motor oil and a performer or minstrel in blackface. A spectre from the grave or from the deep dark past. The next album Glamour explores blackface further. For me its a magical device. Its a method of destabilizing space and time. It is the most powerful method I know of. Like Wrnlrd itself, it works best when you're alone. Once you start trying to explain your delusions to people, the magic dissipates. It can be regained but only through more isolation. Wrnlrd has always been about this, finding a way to record things you can feel but can't see or even speak of properly. Where language is not up to it, maybe music is. And where that fails maybe you have the chance to make something else happen. So I have tried different ways to delude myself into making certain things happen for the microphones. Blackface connects a lot of different things for me. It makes it easier to move between these different times and places. It can be an annex from old time music straight to black metal. Or a bridge between different eras.

In interviews you've discussed the influence of traditional American musical forms like the blues, and country. 'Pentagon' dealt with the occult geography of Washington D.C., and the 9/11 attacks. Why use an originally European musical form to address these topics?

Because I didn't think I could make a good Jazz record. On Pentagon I think the music fits the subject very well, and it doesn't matter where the genre started. The Italians and the Spanish made some good westerns. The next album builds on the country music influence in Pentagon, as in the Prayer Of Death and Shaft Of Ba'al from that album, and takes it much further.

photo credit: wrnlrd

Follow-up question, do you feel that America has co-opted black metal in the same way that traditional African music eventually became the blues, and traditional Irish songs led to Appalachian music? Is there an American aesthetic or sound to black metal, or are such location-based genre-tags useless in a globalized world?

The Blues is not only African Music played in America. It is something new and different, with its own features, with influences from many

other popular musical forms. So I guess for a real American Black Metal sound to develop it would have to be the result of people taking that music very personally, feeling connected to it deeply, and bending it to reflect their own reality in a very natural way out of a feeling of necessity. Not giving a fuck where it comes from, but caring a great deal for what it leads to. This is probably happening somewhere. I don't know where Wrnlrd fits into that. Maybe it doesn't. Probably time will decide that, time and other people. And they will look back and say whether any of this means anything to them. For us it is too easy to put a lot of importance on things just because they are happening now around us. Maybe American Black Metal is as meaningful as swallowing goldfish or hula hooping. Maybe that depends on what people think of it in 10 or 20 years.

Our understanding is that you have two more releases planned. The 8th album was supposed to come in 2011; can you speak about the holdup?

We have a new 7 inch coming out this Summer on FSS called Manikin. Its a single song that sums up a lot of what we've been doing up to now. The Glamour album has been delayed because it is a more involved recording process than our previous albums. There is a much greater variety of instruments. Its nearly finished now.

Have you started work on your final release yet? Can you talk about the process at all? Influences, focal points, or instrumentation?

There will be a ninth Wrnlrd album and right now it looks like I will be recording that alone. The plan is to make it very private, and release only excerpts from it.

For now we're working on the 8th album, Glamour. On this one the process has been to write the songs before recording as opposed to the improvisation method we've been using mostly since 2005. So on Glamour there are several songs written around Buccinator's vocals, accompanied by acoustic guitar, banjo, violin, accordion, piano, and pedal steel guitar. Like the Unknown Tongue EP we put out last Christmas, it sounds like all of the things we have buried in our albums up to now, brought up to the surface. Thematically its a continuation of Myrmidon in an apocalyptic setting. One of the

songs is about Mary, following Johnny's blood trail through the world on fire. If it does end up being the last Wrnlrd album anyone else ever hears, I could live with that.



REVIEWS

Panopticon Kentucky
Handmade Birds, 2012

I cannot stress how magnificent this album is enough, I really cannot. Austin Lunn has outdone himself by leaps and bounds, and I honestly cannot imagine a better example of the possibilities awaiting the future of black metal in America. "Kentucky" begins with a bluegrass sprint that leads into a pummeling black metal assault. Pipes and howls blend together in an unearthly fashion, and for moments they are indistinguishable. A melodic guitar solo burns in, creating a moment of stability among the chaos, and then fades out, allowing the pipes to resume their wailing. This all happens in about forty seconds, and flows effortlessly. The rest of the track continues this relentless experimentation with similar aplomb. The album trades between traditional protest songs and black metal expanses, and neither seems out of place. Samples about the corruption present in the coal mining industry provide a glimpse into the thematic content of the work, and also solidly ground the pieces. These are songs about real people, and real places, and I believe it is that veracity that creates the overwhelming sense of place. American Black Metal at it's very finest.
- ed.

Wreck and Reference No Youth
2012, self-released

Wreck and Reference is one of those bands that defy an easy categorization. The black metal influence is more aesthetic than physical, aside from certain instances of rasp in the vocals. There are bits of industrial samples, post-punk gloominess, goth-esque vocals, and washes of noise and ambient influence. All without the use of guitars! What is remarkable is how they manage to take these similar fringe genres and construct songs that are simultaneously heavy, noisy, and catchy as fuck. I can hear Coil and Current 93 in

certain areas, just to give some reference points as to the range this band is capable of. This is definitely one of the year's best releases and I look forward to hearing more from this band. - Patrick

Cara Neir Stagnant Perceptions
2012, self-released

A duo from Dallas, Texas, this is another band that uses black metal as a base template while adding elements of hardcore, crust, screamo, and sludge. Multi-instrumentalist Garry Brents has been around since 2005, crafting everything from death metal to 90's electronic. This experience and versatility may explain why he is able to take distinct elements, jam them all together, and not have it sound like a ball of crap. A guest vocalist from Grindcore legends Noisear can butt up against post-metal lines without you blinking an eye. A band to look out for in the future. - Patrick

Book of Sand Mourning Star
2012, Music Ruins Lives

This is a tremendously claustrophobic piece of work that lurches from song to song. The first song claws through disharmonic noises that sound like a child banging on a piano, swinging back and forth like a body hanging from a noose. This kind of aggressive and confrontational nature persists throughout the album. The nasal whines on "Planet SUV" resemble bagpipes from hell, screaming their refrain over ominous chords. I've got more examples, but I think you get the idea. This is a nasty piece of work. Highly recommended. - ed.

Cobalt - War Cries Into the Void

Colorado's Cobalt from the very beginning seemed bent on melting your face with an aggression, intensity, and yes, complexity that has very few peers in the USBM scene.

Their first album was the aptly titled War Metal from 2005. As one can imagine, it is a typically lo-fi affair. That does not stop the anger and intensity from bleeding through the speakers. Even at this stage you can hear the all-encompassing aural savagery that would take place on their latter releases. This album marks the only true collaboration between the two members Phil McSorley on Vocals, Guitar and multi-instrumentalist Erik Wunder. Onwards the two would communicate only through phone/email as Mcsorley enlisted in the United States Army.

Eaters of Birds was released in 2007 and definitely shows an increased level of sophistication. In regards to mood, atmosphere, themes, and track placement, it easily trumps War Metal. As a HUGE Swans fan I was quite intrigued to hear that Jarboe appeared on a couple of tracks. Her voice definitely lends something to the almost mystical Southwestern vibe to the album.

Gin represents Cobalt's masterpiece thus far, an endless study of contrasts. With this album, the duo pushed to the limit and the results landed them on many "best of" year-end lists. 'Dry Body' is early highlight of the album with Erik Wunder taking over vocal duties. Wunder's deep baritone cuts through the wall of noise and works its way into the listener's guts. Tracks like 'Arsonry' & 'Two-Tumbed Fist' rages like the songs on the first album but with a newfound depth. Jarboe returns once again for the awesome (in the traditional sense of the word) 'Pregnant Insect'. Her voice inter-mingling with McSorley's, combined with the pounding drums makes one feel like the end is nigh.

McSorley's involvement should not deter those who think Cobalt has some sort of political agenda. Sure McSorley has some questionable views based on his manly wet dream fantasies based on Hemmingway & Nietzsche, but those views are largely kept out of the music. Erik Wunder is in many ways the heart & soul of the group, a master class musician that extends beyond the 'metal' genre. His singer/songwriter project 'Man's Gin is an exceptional piece of work that gives the Steve Von Till & Scott Kelly solo releases a run for their money.

