

HillJack Interviews Nephente & Bizmark of Netherbird 8-22-08

1. **What's with "the guild" of band members? The band started with only 3 and has swelled into 12 at times with certain members only being used on certain songs.... why not just have 5 or 6 full-time members? What are the advantages of having a guild of talent, and does that same sword also serve to cause strife within the group sometimes? Does the guild prevent Netherbird from touring, or are the logistics being worked out to launch an assault?**

Nephente: When we first started out we were three people: myself, Grim and Bizmark, just wanting to start a band where we could focus on writing the music we wanted and have less of the drama and bullshit that many time is associated with having a band where 95% of the energy is put on wasting each others ideas and getting pissed because people are late for rehearsals and so on. So we decided to do it without a full line up and instead opting to work with session members. Some people were just up for a song or two and were cool with that, others wanted a bigger part and has returned for more sessions.

It is mainly a positive thing to work with skilled people without having to worry about if we would like each other outside the studio. I really think a lot of the guild members found it to be rewarding as well not having to worry about anything but the music! I don't think they would have found Netherbird to be interesting if they were asked to join as permanent members which is a big responsibility, now they could just focus on their primal passion: their instrument and do best they could of each tune they performed on! So for us it has been only positive since we have had no live obligations yet. Now as we progress we will form a solid line up with some people from the guild and perhaps some others to create what will be the core of Netherbird for the next album and for the live shows that will come.

It might seem like session members might prevent a band from touring but I think it is the other way around really: they are professional musicians who lead lives that enable them to tour much easier than many people who have families and other careers pinning them down. So we will really still be a guild of people ready to embark our tour of duty when the time comes, the biggest difference is that the same people will be on the whole album and also ready to perform live.

2. **How did Netherbird form with only 3 band members... and none of them a drummer? What were those days like? What were some of the conversations among members about what is Netherbird going to be all about?**

Bizmark: I think our vision was pretty clear regarding how to operate the band, at least in the theory, and you could say that Boulevard Black became the pilot episode. Personally, I saw Netherbird has a chance to work in a different way with really talented people and I didn't really reflect over the future or if we were considered to be a band or a project...we were this creative "thing"...we never saw it as a weakness to not have a drummer or a bass player in the band – today you can easily try out your ideas on the computer, programming the basics just to get a feel for it so the conversations were more

like “who do you think would fit for this track and do we have the number?” he he. It felt pretty creative and free... We also wanted everything that surrounded Netherbird to have the same character and feel...we are all very interested in art and basically any creative way there is to express your self as long as it's dark and honest.

- 3. Any influences from other Swedish acts like Opeth, Arch Enemy, Dark Tranquility or others? Or would you say your influences are from other places, yet still have a common foundation in Swedish metal with those other bands? And what are some of the other black metal influences upon the Netherbird sound?**

Nephente: Yes most of our main influences are bands from the early 90:s death and black metal scene and a couple of our most important ones are: Unanimated, Emperor, Morbid Angel, Edge of Sanity, Vinterland, My Dying Bride, Cradle of Filth, Dimmu Borgir but the list is really endless. I personally have a huge collection of metal and it grows daily and so does my influences. The only limiting factor is time really since it is nearly impossible to listen to all new bands out there but I do my best hehe. But Netherbird as a band is very rooted in the Scandinavian metal legacy and I think that is evident in our sound.

- 4. Is Netherbird a band, or more of a project? If you say it's a project band or a band project, I'm gonna have to stop right now... heh heh heh...! What is the will of the members... to be in a band, or tinker within a project? Will Netherbird ever be able to consider itself either?**

Bizmark: I guess we were more of a project in the beginning. I don't think any of us realized the importance off what we were creating in the beginning and we didn't really reflect over how people would view us...a band or a project? – didn't matter it weren't really relevant for us. We were about the music and expressing our dark twisted visions in any way there were. Today the situation is different. There have been less people involved on each recording and that has not been an active chose but more of a natural development. Were getting closer to the next stage...to leave the cocoon and grow into a butterfly. But to answer your question, yes – we're a band but for now that's all we can reveal. We are in discussions in this very moment and time will tell what members the band will consist off.

- 5. What are your lyrical influences?**

Nephente: Since I write all the lyrics I can easily answer this question. I take my inspiration from life and the dark thoughts always filling my mind. So I reflect a lot on existence and what it is like to be a person always feeling “out of place”. So those thoughts tend to be existential I guess and since I have a fascination for dark themes my lyrics tend to celebrate the odd and the shunned. When it comes to influences my writing is mainly the result of reading a lot of literature but I try my best to keep my texts rather “simple” not overdoing them or make them to hard to grasp. I cannot tell if I am

successful at that but I try to write lyrics that makes sense to those that read them so they are important to me and to Netherbird.

6. **Is Netherbird driven by lyrics, guitars, attitude or something else?**

Bizmark: That's a tricky question...I mean musically it's driven by the guitars since that is what every new song begins with....a riff structure...but the riff didn't come from me alone. Since we all know each other better now than when we started, I write the guitars with Nephentes vocal style and natural rhythmic in the back of my head and he write his lyrics, partly inspired from what I come up with on the guitar and so forth, so everything becomes a never ending circle...everything has been moulded together so I can't really explain it...it just happens....and I believe that's a good thing. In the end, I'd say that everything plays an almost equal role...lyrics, guitars, art etc. It's a natural balance and it's in that moment the magic appears. Does it make any sense?

7. **Who is the main song writer? What is the process like?**

Nephente: Bizmark is the song writer for Netherbird. The process is always this: He writes the core of the tracks on guitar with some basic adds on bass, keyboards and a frame of drums. When he feels its ready he sends the track to me and I listen to it and add the title and some basic ideas for alterations, seldom needed thou. And then we repeat this process until we have enough songs for an album. At that point I write the lyrics. When finalizing the songs Bizmark and Nord records the guitars, then Bizmark records the arrangements with keyboards. The last steps are the recording of drums and bass and we finish it off with my vocals and Nord:s vocal parts.

8. **How hard is it to relate and describe what you are hearing in your head to other band members? Do you find it frustrating? Have there been times you felt you still didn't get it across what you wanted? What does the success feel like to you when it actually does work out the way you planned?**

Bizmark: I'm slowly getting to know my-self better and how to express my visions on the guitars and keys but it still sounds...different in my head from how it sounds on the recordings...something happens along the way and it seem to be impossible to control.

I always hear the vocal arrangements in my head when I'm writing a riff but it's impossible to manifest that into a track since the vocals are created from lyrics...I mean, some lyrics are suited for screaming, others for growling and some maybe even for clean vocals so in the end it comes down to what Nephente writes. I've always told myself not to fuck around with the lyrics...and that's something I have stuck to from the very beginning. What happens in Nephentes head is out of my reach even thou I always have a vision of how I want a certain part to be sung. I never interfere with the lyrical content but I do try to get the rhythmic ideas for the vocal to work...but sometimes it's better just to let fate decide for you.

When it comes to drums it's easier since we can always program our basic ideas and show to the drummer. In the end, it's great to see everything fall into place...but it's never and I mean never, the same thing as you thought it would be from the beginning...but that's the beauty of making music together with other people...that's the X-factor.

9. There are some big name players associated with Netherbird... has that helped spreading the word? Do the fans of those big names accept Netherbird or resent what you are trying to do?

Nephente: Interesting question, the reason everyone we worked with, known or unknown, is that we thought they could bring something important to the band musically. Since drums without a doubt is the most demanding role in an extreme metal band those that had what it takes are all rather well known. So it would be impossible to find a drummer that is unknown that would be able to play our tunes, at least no one we could find. I haven't really felt we gotten that much publicity from involving the more well known people but no one has complained so I guess it has been more positive than negative. I guess more people would have resented us if we made bad songs ;)

10. You gave away 3 LPs in 2 years, something very rare. Why?

Bizmark: Why not? I mean, if you want to download the music you'll download it anyway. The Ghost Collector were out on the net weeks before the release he he...and no, we're not bitter – rather the opposite, we're glad that the interest is so big in our music and it gives more people a chance to find us. When you like a band, you'll buy the CD anyway because you want the artwork and you want to show them your support. The Ghost Collector was created by the fans, it was they who demanded to have it on a CD and we gave it to them. It was never meant to be a CD in the first place, or let me rephrase-not a CD with these tracks anyway...it just happened, then we added up a couple of bonus tracks to it that wasn't previously released.

11. Do you plan to stick with the symphonic black metal sound? Is that part of the Netherbird signature sound, or will we see any departure from it?

Nephente: our sound will most likely not change a lot on our upcoming albums but the tunes we have written are a bit shorter and perhaps a bit more metal oriented. But it will sound Netherbird when they are all done so there will be no intentional alterations other than that we continue to improve as musicians so hopefully the tunes will improve along with us! Time will tell and the next album

12. When the symphonic sounds and choir sounds are used... is that planned at the time of song writing, or is it something that is added at time of production?

Bizmark: Well, sometimes it's planned and sometimes not...it depends on what lyrics Nephente puts down, I mean, there have been times when I've wanted to have them in

certain places for musical reasons but it's been impossible since they didn't fit with the lyrical content... as I said, I never touch the lyrics so I guess Nephente is controlling that part even though it's most of the times unintentional.

13. Is every lick, every line, every beat calculated... or do some happen by chance?

Nephente: We tend to be rather precise when we write our music but nothing is "cast in stone" so we usually add some "ad libs" in the studio when it comes to vocals. The same goes for drums, we have them rehearsed but the beauty with music is inspiration and sometimes that can add a lot to a tune. But we never write on chance but sometimes the performance in the studio might carry a song in a direction we didn't expect and if it sounds good we keep it!

14. Do you always get what you want, or do you have to make compromise with other band members? What influence do producers have on the final product?

Bizmark: To little he he, I mean as long as you're working with people and not machines – it's out of control. As a producer you try to guide it so that everything fits together in a natural balanced way but working with other people is the same thing as compromise, right? But as I mentioned before, that's where the magic happens!

15. Is it hard to find a producer with that much support and faith in your vision? Do they tend to help you or influence you?

Nephente: Bizmark (with the moniker PNA when producing) is our producer so we never have a problem with that part. That is also the reason why we can make it all "fit" since we got all the aspects of production in the band: technicians, producer and so on. So it is never a problem. The only problem is that, since we work in our own studio, we tend to keep on going when other producers would have said "that's good enough" just to get home.

16. With such a wide range of vocals, do you find it hard to keep the voice in shape for tour and live performance situations? How do you manage when you are feeling sick?

Nephente: It is always a question of finding rest for the voice if you have to perform a number of times in a row. But studio sessions are really more demanding because we can record for entire days so there it is really more of a challenge. Some extreme vocalists sing with a rather low "volume" and that is a way for some to preserve their voice. I however really go at it rather violent so that takes its toll when you do it for hours straight haha. When I started growling back in the day I used to spit blood after rehearsal and I don't have that problem anymore so the weaker parts of my throat lost the battle it seems. So it is all good now hehe.

17. Have you ever skipped a song at a performance because you knew the vocals would wreck your voice tonight, and ruin a series of shows?

Nephente: Since we have not put Netherbird on a stage yet I cannot say for sure but I hardly think I would ever consider skipping a song, I am more likely to perform as we planned and take the hit afterwards. When you are fully focused on stage you give everything you got to deliver the tunes so you really don't feel pain. At least not in a bad way! But the question is a damn good one I must say, would I think twice about giving my last bit of throat at a concert if we had a huge venue waiting the day after? I sure hope I would keep that in mind but in reality I don't think I would be able to stop myself.

18. Your acoustic work is different from other metal acts... can you comment how you are able to do this? Is it a conscious effort to be different, or is it a natural process?

Bizmark: No that's all natural. I think it's a good thing that it's different but it's far from planned. I guess it's because we have different influences maybe and that we're not afraid of trying out new things.

19. When did you realize metal is what you wanted to do? Where were you at in life? Describe what was going on around you and what lead you to this decision?

Nephente: I became a metal head after seeing WASP on TV at the age of nine. They placed the video for "I Wanna Be Somebody" and it just blew me away. Those guys were the coolest people I have ever seen so I got their album and found my way to other stuff like "Shout at the Devil" by Crüe" and I felt at home. Around 1988 I stumbled upon thrash by coincidence when in Florida and, once again, felt that this was the next natural step. From there on I quickly got into the black and death metal scene (Scandinavian mainly but also the US) and haven't looked back since. I am extreme metal through and through. I have always considered myself a fan and I have no intention of ever changing. I don't stage dive anymore but I go to as many metal concerts as possible and I feel at home in the crowd. When I am in a hall watching a band perform I feel immortal, as a part of a bigger being, the scene. With Netherbird I feel I have a possibility to contribute to that phenomenon I am humbled and proud at the same time.

20. Do you listen to other types of music besides metal? And if you say yes, then what are those types? Who are some of the non-metal driven bands you let in from time-to-time? If you say no, then why not?

Nephente: Ok, this might be confession time hehe and you wanted some facts about us few others have. In my record collection I have about 35 CD:s with Christian Death, that's not very metal but for some reason I have always felt a connection to the music they make. Another personal favourite that might surprise some people is Loreena McKennitt. Her music opens a portal to a place in my mind where I very seldom go but it is a beautiful place.

Bizmark: Well I'm a sucker for the Seattle scene. One of my fav band are Alice in Chains...I can relate to the frustration and madness in the lyrics and the music is excremental and honest...I was blown away when I heard the MTV unplugged and just though, yeah – that's exactly how it is! I guess you might find it strange but It's either metal or grunge for me...kind of a Jing and Yang relation.

21. What's on your iPod or mp3 player?

Bizmark: Right now I'm listening to the Swedish black metal band Naglfar's new album- Harvest. That's good shit! But to be honest I rarely listen to new music at all these days, mainly out of lack of time so it's a lot of 90's metal and rock...

22. Is there another band out there you think should get more recognition than they get? Who are they, and why should they be getting more attention?

Nephente: I always think Unanimated is one of the best bands I have ever heard and their albums (especially the first one) is a must have for anybody into black/death-metal.

Bizmark: I'd like to place a vote for Necrophobic...they have a dark sphere and some really grim riffs happening.

23. What are your comments on downloading music and the Internet in general?

Nephente: I think it is brilliant that more people get access to more music. It can never be a bad thing in itself! More bands get their music out and people listen to more music now than ever before. And yes, the major labels sell less albums but I will not lay sleepless thinking to much about their losses really, because today any band with talent can be heard with, or without, being "in the club". If you got great tunes, people will hear your music. When I started playing music in the early 90:s tape trades made the exact same thing happen. Now it is just more bands and more people. At some point a band must find income otherwise they will starve to death but I think it is more question for us as musicians to find ways to offer something that our listeners will accept to pay for. That might not be the songs themselves ten years from now, well then perhaps it is tickets to concerts or t-shirts. And those tickets might not have been sold if people haven't downloaded and spread the music. So I think for most bands this is more of a chance than a problem. Do I worry? No I really don't, I think a lot about what we can offer to those people that have downloaded our music to make them able to support us if they like our music but I cant say that selling CD:s is the only way. We must listen to our listeners and their ideas because I think they are interested in supporting bands they like but perhaps in new ways. Downloading will never stop, why should it? The world has changed and we must not only change with it, we must lead the change together with the people who listen to our music. I don't know where that road will take us, but I sure as hell know that we will walk that road way ahead of the big labels.

24. Any North American tour dates planned?

Bizmark: Since we haven't presented a line up yet it's not on the map right now but our intention is to play world wide and it would be an honour to shred in North America...it will happen thou, the question is when!

25. What are the bands goals...? To rule Scandinavia? Europe? The world?

Bizmark: he he I don't know if I would use the world rule but like every band we want to reach as many people as possible... did I mention the Universe? No seriously, we'll take it as far as it's possible but it all comes down to our fans, we'll keep making music and develop as long as someone wants to hear us!

26. How have your views changed? Has success, fame or money changed your views?

Bizmark: No I don't think we'll ever change because of success.. at least not in a bad sense...I'd say it's the opposite, the more fans and success we get - the more humble we get towards what we're doing and creating, It's an honour to be a part of this. We've been lucky enough to meet a lot of great musicians and stars and the ones we like are the ones that have stayed the same, that's respect and that is something we look up to!

27. Do you find your fans are loyal to only to Netherbird, or do they have multiple bands they follow? Do you find fans to be blind and rabid, or more just "living the moment" of the Netherbird experience?

Nephente: We sure have a number of very devoted listeners who seems to be very into the music we make. Most of them surely listen to more bands as well but some are very hard core. It is a little to early to tell if they will stick around or if we are a passing phase for them but some devote a lot of energy into our band and to promoting us. I feel humbled by the fact that they are so interested in our music really and that it means so much to them. I wouldn't say they are blindly following us, at least I damn sure hope they aren't, but we will never let those people down or ever make them feel anything but "seen" and treasured. Our listeners are the most important part of Netherbird. Without them it would be all for nothing wouldn't it? So we spend many hours every day just keeping in touch with our listeners on myspace and by mail and that is more rewarding than I can explain, they make us into what we are!

28. What is your "Spinal Tap" moment? What's the funniest or most embarrassing thing to happen to you while on the road, or on stage or backstage?

Bizmark: Time to get careful...well I mean the whole music scene is a big spinal tap moment...but I think photo shoots are the most anti-star stuff you can do. We've done some sessions in rather cold environments when people have been walking by in broad daylight watching these dressed up dudes in make-up freezing their asses off in the water...if you stand with a guitar on a beach in the winter you feel pretty silly right? But I

think we'll save the drunk incidents for later...but we're pretty good at emptying the backstage bars and everything that comes with it...

29. What is the wildest fan you have ever seen? What did they do? What happened?

Nephente: we have our share of stories but I can only say it has to do with female fans getting a bit carried away. We don't mind but we try to spare people the possible embarrassment of sharing such stories. We might write a book one day, most likely on our death beds hehe. Just to make our offspring hide in shame for some years or start a band of their own trying to top us hehe.

30. Can we expect to see you back in The HillJack's Groovy Workshed in the future?

Bizmark: If you'll have us – we'll be there!