

NETHERBIRD

Interview with Nephente for Metal Hammer Russia

15.11.2008, Stockholm

/full version/

Let's make the first step from the point of the very beginning – how it all started with Netherbird? When listening to the music, I've got a strong feeling that the idea was there long before the band was actually born.

Yes, the question is really interesting to me, because first I'm very pleased by the fact that you note that we had an idea of what Netherbird was. It wasn't just something taken out of the blue, it was really a visual idea that me and the other two forming members have had – some parts of it are mine, and some of it belongs to Grim and to Bizmark, the other two guys who were there when we founded the band. But I've been doing music in extreme metal since 1990, and of course the bands that I started out were amateur bands, we had our limitations, we could just make music that well as our ability to play the instruments allowed. I mean that limitation of how capable we were at the instruments, we could not progress further than what our abilities allowed us to. And when we started speaking about Netherbird, it was the other way around, instead of focusing on who will be able to play drums or how fast is the drummer, we instead discussed that it would be better, for us at least, to focus on the music we want to make. And then afterwards see, who would be able to perform this or that instrument. So that gave us a limitless scope of what we were able to record, and that made a big difference for me, because then we could just focus on writing. And previously in all bands - I've been involved in many bands – you write in the rehearsal room, you write with all people together. And instead, now we could just sit with a guitar and start to hammer out riffs, and then think of who will be able to blastbeat at 280 bpm. That was really one of the basics of the Netherbird concept – not to focus on lineup; the other one was just also to do the other stuff, what usually comes to be left second, or third, or in 55th place – that is the artwork, the concept, I mean the total sum of the concept. And now we were able and we were mutually interested in also working with the artwork and working with the lyrical concepts, and so forth. So that was for the first time for me, that we could start with all those things in parallel, instead of just hammering out the songs in the rehearsal room, then add a logo, add some lyrics and we were done. It was a complete concept for us, and I'm really pleased to hear that we are able to convey that to the listeners as well. So that's the basics of Netherbird. When we formed it we had a very clear idea on what we were doing, and to some degree we've been able to establish that. But we have a long way to go, we have a lot of hard work still ahead of us – so we're at least progressing now. The first album is out, and it sounds quite similar to what I had in mind and the rest of the guys as well.

The first album will be definitely discussed in this interview also, and as for now let's continue with the basics of the things – how the name was born, and does it actually have something to deal with Sumerian mythology?

Actually the name was formed by the fact that I've been playing around with words for my entire life. I've always liked to find the new combinations that freeze the mind a little bit and make you think. So I really wanted this band to have a name that would in some way convey or describe what our idea of the band is, without being too obvious. Without writing out: "This is the band of the free souls", or whatever. So the image of a bird came very natural to me, and then it was a question how to form a name based on the bird concept – because a bird for me stands for freedom and for levitation from the common strains of life, I mean it's free and it's beautiful. But I also wanted to convey some dark notions as well, because Netherbird is and will always be a very dark concept, because we are after all dark metalheads, all of us. The Netherbird word

combination came out something very natural when I played around with words: instead of “stormbirds” or something like that, we tried to find something that hasn’t been used. So if someone googles the name, most likely he will find our stuff. If it’s Sumerian mythology – it might be. But I’d really like to let the listener interpret what the name stands for. Anyway it’s darkness, beauty and freedom – so that explains why we chose the name of the black bird.

That really explains everything, and concerning the matter why I came up with Sumerian myths – there was a character of a dark stormbird, called Anzu-bird, and this name, if translated from Sumerian, means “heavy rain” – which sounds familiar to your band, doesn’t it?

Yeah, I know, and it’s a really spooky similarity, because Netherbird in Swedish, if you pronounce it badly, it sounds like “nederbörd”, and “nederbörd” means “heavy rain”. And also the symbol that we chose for the band, it’s the symbol of heavy rain, so it’s all interconnected. But yeah, it’s quite an interesting notion.

Looks like it was a combination of things, that just came together.

It was. And also it’s not too cheesy! (laughs) I mean, Christophe [Szpajdel] made the logo, he made it so evident to us that the name was correct, and it really sprung to life when we saw the logo that he drawn for us. It just blew us away, and it was natural: OK, we are Netherbird, this is what we do.

And how did you meet Bizmark? For how long do you know each other?

We first met in 2004 in the summertime, when I was recording with Fear The Future. And we had some drum editing problems, because we were recording on actual tapes – and we had some problems with the drums, so the drummer of that band called a good friend of his, who was really a technical person. And then a curly-haired guy with a lot of attitude and a lot of spirit and energy sat for 17 hours straight in the studio converting stuff from tape to digital, doing some editing and then converting it back. He hadn’t slept for 24 hours when he came, and he didn’t sleep there, so he was just slapping his face to stay awake and drank a lot of coffee. And I’ve never seen or met anybody that hard-working within the music scene ever, so I was really blown away by the sheer energy of this guy and his professionalism. We spoke now and then during these 17 hours, and it turned out we had a lot of similar musical influences, and he turned out to be a guitarist himself. So he just blew me away by the sheer energy of him, and so we agreed on getting together at some point to discuss something. Then it took a while before I made a phone call to him, but he was instantly interested in creating something together with me. So it was the most natural thing in the world for us just to start talking, and it turned out to have a lot of similarities. So from the first meeting to Netherbird starting it was four months.

As far as I know, the initial idea was to call your first album *Monument Black Colossal*. So what made you change your mind and name it as it is, *The Ghost Collector*?

Actually the thing is that we really thought our first album would be called *Monument Black Colossal*, but *The Ghost Collector* came out by the fact that Pulverised Records in Singapore, since we released the first single, - very limited single that we sent out to the media, it’s only 100 copies, - they instantly made connections and said they were interested. And we said, no, we are not interested, because we’re just a new band, we need to work a lot before we are ready to sign to a label. But they’ve been – not pushing us, but they’ve been asking constantly, - and our first idea was just to release our stuff in the internet. Since a lot of people were asking us for a record - the *true* record, - we said we might collect everything that we had released for free and just add

a couple of songs, and it will be *The Ghost Collector*, because every track that we released we saw as a small ghost. So it was a natural name for us – just to collect these ghosts into something. Of course it has a different meaning as well, but anyways – then we had already planned our first full-length album, but it will never be called *Monument Black Colossal* for various reasons. So it really was the record we were supposed to release, but *The Ghost Collector* came a little bit earlier than planned. So that's a long and strange answer to a very simple question... And *The Ghost Collector* wasn't thought through until we realized that people craved for an album, and we had a label ready to push it out. So we started to focus on that, and we changed a lot of concepts for the upcoming songs, and the title *Monument Black Colossal* was no longer the album title.

I must also say that the very idea to release your first records through the internet was a really brave one. Of course we all must consider the technological aspect of our society, but it also deals with decent financial losses for the band. So how actually did you decide to make such a brave step in your career?

It's really interesting, I don't think we would have this interview if it wasn't for the fact that we did release stuff on the internet. Because that's one of the things, that perhaps is quite evident to people, that we do things differently. And I think that has been very important to us in order to reach out... For us it was natural, we don't see our listeners as criminals (laughs), and we know that when we put things out in the internet, it will be available for illegal downloads. And instead of making it available as illegal downloads, we thought – let's make it legal! Perhaps they will buy a shirt or anything. I mean we're artists, musicians, and our only goal in life is to get our music out there. So for us, since we had no label pushing us in the other direction, it was the plan from the day one to release one single and two EP's for free, just to see if the people are into our music and just to let them download it legally. This is a bit controversial, but anyway I'll say it – I wouldn't mind releasing an album both on CD – for people who really want the disc, so they can buy it, - but instead of making illegal downloads, why not to put the entire disc out on our website. I mean, it's out there anyway, so it's just a matter of if you make people illegal for liking your music or if they are legally listening to it. They will listen to it anyway, and that's the main goal of an artist. But I will have a hard time convincing a label that it's the right way to do things, but I really don't mind people listening to our music - and then hopefully they buy a shirt. I mean, we would be bankrupt if nobody bought the album, that's a sad fact of life, but I see our listeners as the biggest value, and if I can do anything to make them hear our music legally, I will. So the last word isn't said about the future releases, and the music industry is today battling to find a stance when it comes to downloads. And I still think we have a long way to go. I don't consider an MP3 worth – in Sweden you pay 1 euro to download one song from iTunes, and I think that's too much, because an MP3 has a very little value. An album should have a great value, but to the few people who want an album. If they don't want an album, it has no value to them, and I can't convince them otherwise. So for us the number of listeners is more interesting than money. So that's why we made this decision.

Anyway, it was a brave thing to do, but also it seems to be the right one, considering the amount of your friends on MySpace, which must be really inspiring! But back to the album – how did you get such a brilliant constellation of musicians that appeared on your record? And have you known all of them prior to the recordings, or maybe the joint work itself in some cases became a good reason to get acquainted?

That's a really interesting question, it's the first time someone has asked me, really, so thank you for that one! No, we were not acquainted with these people, I mean we're all parts of the extreme metal scene, and I knew *of* them – but I didn't know them personally that well. So it's always been a question of first writing the songs, then listening to them, and: oh yeah, this might be

something that Adrian could do something with! So for us it's an excuse to get to know a lot of people that we really, really value, we see them as legends, and we are pleased... But also we see them as absolutely fascinating musicians, so we have sent them the songs, and we have not been turned down by anybody. But we didn't know them prior. Still we always made sure that we were compatible as persons before we met in the studio. But it's always a risk, I mean everybody says "Oh, that's a huge risk!", but it's also a great opportunity – I mean, we get to work with people with spectacular skills, that we would have normally not have a chance to. But they seemed to be thrilled by the opportunity to do their stuff – we want them to have full freedom when they record with Netherbird, to do their stuff. I want Adrian to be super-Adrian, because he does know how to play drums - and nobody knows how Adrian should do drums better than Adrian. So for us it's just a creative envelope where you can expand stuff as much as you like. We have gotten to know a lot of good friends during that procedure, so we're really blessed and fortunate. I still think we've been very lucky to run across these talented people, and the fact that our music has appealed to them – nobody did it for the money, they made it because that gave them a creative opportunity, I think. And I'm truly humbled by the fact that we have been working with these people, whom I now consider friends, all of them.

I think the reason for them to jump aboard the ship is that our music to me has always felt very natural and perhaps typically Scandinavian metal, more like 95 than 2008, and I think many of them had their roots in that scene, so like me. So they hear something that strikes a familiar sound to them that they haven't heard for a while. And now they get the chance to play something - I know, for instance, Adrian said that he got that Eucharist vibe from the songs, - which is for me the greatest compliment ever! – and that made him try this out, because he felt it was very close to his initial influences. But I'm still very humbled by the fact that they just heard the guitar demo and said "Alright, I will do this". I'm still shocked by that, and I'm the luckiest guy in the world to have this opportunity. And I will spare no energy when it comes to saying how grateful I am to these people, because they really made Netherbird what Netherbird is about. We made a foundation for the stuff, but they really made Netherbird Netherbird. It's been so creative and interesting face for us – big risk, but also very cool.

In the end, it worked – that's the main point! But if we talked about the recording lineup, now it's time to discuss the actual lineup for this moment. So can you present the members who are the part of a solid band now?

When we started out we had no idea on whether Netherbird would be the thing for us or not, because it was such an alternative creative idea, so we didn't really know if it would work out, if we would like each other, because we are all very focused people... We didn't know whether we would make this happen or not, so we tried that out with one track and we found instantly that yes, this is something we're supposed to do. But the process of having a fluid lineup would make it impossible to do live gigs and to be a real band. We're always considered a project, but no, we're a band – so we had to make that step to form a solid lineup. At some point this is a good moment, so that lineup is me as a vocalist, and it's Bizmark as a guitarist and he also does some keyboards – and he might do that live as well, we don't know, perhaps we'll have to add a keyboardist live. And then it's Johan Nord, who is a new figure – but he's been around, he's been working as a technician for some of the recordings and he's also been a part of the band from Lighthouse Eternal EP and forth. He plays a second guitar and he also does some backing vocals – growling and some clean vocals, he has a wonderful voice. And then it's Adrian Erlandsson, who is officially a member of the band, playing drums. Then we have a bassist, but it's not confirmed, so I cannot say who it is - but it's a very talented guy who will add a lot to the band, but since it's not confirmed and he has a chance to back out I will not mention him by name, I hope that's alright.

Of course, we'll wait for the news! Actually there's one really interesting thing about Scandinavian bands – I've been told a lot of times by different people in the scene, that there is a kind of a 'weather factor' within the Scandinavian metal. That the music is somehow influenced by the weather and the general atmosphere around this part of the world – like, it's cold and dark over here for more than half a year, and this somehow inspires their creativity. So what is your insight, does this weather factor matter, and is it of an influence to your band?

I think my answer will be a little bit more complicated. I think weather is a factor why Swedish bands sound like Swedish bands, or Scandinavian – I see very little difference between us and Norwegians, and Danish and perhaps Finnish. I think the climate in this place, and the darkness has really made its mark on the traditional Swedish and Scandinavian music, the folk music. And the folk music is what's black and death metal to me – the tones and everything are in harmony with this place. I wouldn't say that we don't depend on the weather, we don't write happy songs during the sunny days, perhaps we're drinking beer then. But I think the weather and the climate have really influenced the music that we traditionally made and the music that we make today, which is modern folk music really. So yes, it could not have been done in Spain, it would have sounded differently, and the issues that would drive you to make extreme music in Spain are different, so hence it will also sound different. So yes, the gloom of this place that we are from, and the awesome epic landscapes – of course it influences us, we are very Scandinavian when it comes to how we feel and how we act. So yeah, the weather is a factor, but it has more influenced the folk music - which has influenced us, - than us directly.

And your meteorological symbol is also a kind of confirmation to this!

I'd say so! I mean there is no weather that I like more than extreme thunder. But we don't have that very extreme thunder in Sweden, so that's why I really would like to experience some really heavy thunder sometimes... When Thor rides the sky, and the thunder roars, I am a very happy person, I get chills and the goose-bumps, I feel very alive, so thunder is important to us.

But how did you actually come across this symbol?

We always try to make things as simple as possible, and we really wanted something a little bit less complicated than our logo to represent the band. And we were discussing that quite a bit, and I was at home watching the weather forecast, and I saw the "R"-symbol for thunder – and I thought: that's a fucking cool rune! It's a meteorological symbol, but it looks like a rune, and it stands for everything that I find the most powerful in the world. Then I checked out the meteorological character chart, and I found that symbol 99 – I think, ordinary thunder is 98, but 99 is a severe thunder. It's the "R" with a twist and a triangle on top of it. I've never seen this symbol, but it makes sense to me, this is Netherbird. So that's why we picked it – because it represents majesty, thunder and the awesomeness of a thunderstorm. It's a little bit pretentious of us, but I like the symbol, and I also find it very beautiful.

It's very descriptive, I would say, when it comes to understanding your music. And also to understand it better I think many readers will be curious to know a bit of your personal music history: how it all began for you and how old were you when you started listening to metal and later found your own way into the sphere.

I got my first LP when I was five, and it was by a Swedish rockabilly band – they had a song called *Mr Bassman*, and I thought this song was so awesome! And as it would turn out, I would be a bassman, but that's a later story. Then I got a little bit older and I had some friends who were listening to the things like Motley Crue, Accept and so forth, and I found it was awesome

music. The first band I formed was called Twisted Sister Jr., and we performed on my parents' rooftop just imagining being playing instruments. My dad made me a V-guitar, just an ordinary piece of wood, and we were just pretending - and people were paying just to... of course nobody really was there, it was for only our parents there (laughs), but I did my first performance at eight along with my friends. And at the age of nine I saw on Swedish television the W.A.S.P. video for *I Wanna Be Somebody*, and I suddenly understood: that is what I want to do! Blackie Lawless - that is the coolest guy ever! So that's when I found heavy metal and from that on I've always been listening to heavy metal. But as I progressed, I was in the States in 88, and I bought some LP collections, and there were some tracks by Anthrax and Exodus, and I just realized - oh yeah, there is a hell of a lot heavier music than the stuff that I'm listening to. And that really became of an interest to me, so that's how I discovered Metallica - because I'm from a really small town, we had no scene, no heavy metal people, there were just me and some friends who said that the double bass drum is the shit. The stuff that changed my life forever is the Earache compilation called *Grindcrusher* with bands such as Bolt Thrower, Morbid Angel, Napalm Death, Godflesh, Filthy Christians - they just opened my ears, and I was totally blown away by that, and I just said: "Fuck, this is cool!" And then me and some friends formed a band, without us knowing another band was formed in the same village. I grew up in a very small village with 3,000 inhabitants, and we had two bands. And we got together, and as it turned out, some of them were serious in my band and some of them were serious in this other band - so we, just by doing some turmoil, combined these to the first band I was into - it was in 1990, and the band was Toxic Breath. We wanted to be a thrash band, so we had thrash, we were looking thrash - we had flannel shirts, we had the Bermuda shorts and we were watching *Headbanger's Ball* constantly just to understand how we're supposed to be. And it made a really big impression on us. So we started as a thrash band. In 1991 I fell in love deeply with death metal, so I started growling as a back-up singer, and then we fired the singer, the lead vocalist, and continued as a trio called Sickness - and we started to play death metal - really primitive and simple death metal. And from that point on I played bass and growled, and in 93 we added a bassist who would later become a bandmate in another band, and I just started to sing. I was really inspired at that time by combination of vocals - deep growls and high-pitched screams - and that was really hard to do while playing bass, so from 1993 I've been a growler and screamer. And that band continued until 1997 or 1998, I don't really know when we disbanded - and then I had some years off, and after that I met some friends at the bar, and we said: hell, we're got to do this again! So we formed the band Fear The Future, which was a rather primitive black metal band, and it was the first time when I really felt I was going in the right direction. So I've been in the extreme music as a performer since 1990, and the biggest shows I've done so far I did very early in my career, when I was really young. But really the biggest ones are yet to be done. So since 1990 I've been a thrasher, a mosher, a death metalist ever since, and it doesn't seem to be running out of energy to do this. For me it's always been just a matter of making music that makes sense to me, I've never had an idea or been craving that I must be a black metalist or death metalist or something like that. It just came naturally to me, I seem to have vocal cords for it, so I'm lucky!

I can only imagine, it must have felt very special to be a part of this Scandinavian scene since the very beginning and through the most epic age of it!

And that's the reason why we started it, because the other guys that were playing in these bands - I mean I was and still am a huge fan of Entombed - but those guys were of our age, they just did it. So that really did inspire us to do it ourselves. I mean there were no extreme bands where I came from, there were no long-haired people - we were the first. But then some girls turned their attention to us, which made it all worthwhile (laughs) And then we met some other fucked-up people who also have been into extreme music - and it made so much sense, anywhere you went in Sweden you found cool people who were just starting their own bands. Some of them went to be Desultory or whatever - these people made history, but we weren't aware of that, we were just

getting drunk and playing music. I performed with Dissection in 1994-1995, and for us they were just another band; they were cool people doing awesome music – but for us it was just a thing happening, so it came so natural. Now I'm looking back – I can only say that some of these bands were truly brilliant, but back then they were just nice people that you could relate to. I hope it will continue to be that way with the extreme metal, that anybody can do it – because you never know who's got the talent, so better give it a shot, don't preplan it too much, just try it out! It's for everybody.

And what can you say about this Scandinavian scene right now, I mean is it really equally big as it may seem from the outside? I guess, when you look from the inside, there can be some different angles to look from.

That's a really intriguing question. I'd say the scene has changed a little bit. The biggest change is that you have fewer live performances going on, and I'd also say the internet has made all bands work a little bit more in parallel instead of together. I mean, everybody's doing their thing. My feeling is that it's less a community than it used to be with the tape traders and people going to every store and every show. I mean, when I meet people who were active then, we all know every demo of every band, we know every record – and now when I meet youngsters in the scene, some of them really don't know the history as well as we did. So I'd say it changed a little bit, but I think that the new bands have their own community. Since I am not from Stockholm or Gothenburg, I see the scene a little bit different. But it has changed somehow – the bands are so professional today when they start out, they are really to make it. Back then – some made it, but it was more of a freak chance than from anything else, we just played the music best we could when things happened; today it's so precalculated, and I think this also deals with the fact that the skills of people have increased so much. It's fewer bands that are not so good that try it out, it's just the best musicians. And I think the scene has become a little bit smaller actually – I might be wrong, but back then everybody was in a band - or it felt like everybody was in a band. But today it's a little bit more rare, because people have these high standards, so they don't dare to try it out until they're really skilled. I think that's a little bit bad, I think they should just go for it. But yes, the scene is still vibrant, I mean we have new bands coming out all the time, and the level of their professionalism, the level of their delivery is higher than ever. Some of the debut albums today are so good! The demos that we made sound so amateurish in comparison. But sometimes I also think that they're preplanned a little bit too much, they just don't do it – they think a little bit too much of what they want to achieve, and sometimes I think it's better to just be true to yourself and play the music that you like, better than thinking of who will listen to this and will they buy your album. Because that was never an idea back then, and it was never the idea of Netherbird – we knew what we wanted to do, and if nobody would have cared about Netherbird we would still have done it the same way. So we're very old-fashioned in that way, even though we have a plan for what we do, the plan is not still a record, it's to make the music we like. And sometimes I think we have lost that a little bit.

A bit one-off question, but is it possible today in Sweden to make your living just by playing music?

Oh, that's very hard. I'd say it's harder than it seems really. It all depends on where you put the level of your ambition when it comes to your lifestyle, I'd say. You can survive on it if you're a medium-sized band, but it won't be a rich life. And also I think that might be one of the factors that made people think too much, they're aiming too fast to be supported by music for their lifestyle instead of having a shitty job. We all have shitty jobs, but it supports us and our creativity. There are some bands that survive on this, but most bands have jobs in parallel – the jobs that matter very little to them, jobs that enable them to take time off. But it's hard, it's really hard – fewer bands than I might imagine really make all their living from the music, but still it's

very possible, there are a lot of bands that I know that make at least enough to come by from the music.

You know, one of the main things that fascinate me about Netherbird is that this is a band which combines not only the different styles of music, but also different kinds of art. It is also literature – poetry and philosophy blended in it, - and the visual aspects... So was it the initial idea to combine these different forms of art in one?

Yes, it was, and I'm blown away by the fact you've seen it. Of course, not being limited in genres - as I said, I myself am a thrasher, death metalist, black metalist, doom metalist, punk, a heavy metalist – that's one of the things, we said: we should not at all limit ourselves, we do whatever we like. Is that a doomy part – let's do doomy. And then it became natural to us since we have no limitations to what genre we play music from, then we don't have any limitations when it comes to vocals delivered; and when I can do vocals high-pitched, or growled, or clean or whatever it also becomes very easy for me to incorporate different moods in the lyrics. So I try to make the lyrics fit the music, and vice versa. And also with the artwork it's the same way: we try to have it all interconnected. For instance, one example is the *Blood Orchid* EP: we have written the music for *Blood Orchid*, and then we talked to a French artist Meli who made the artwork for it, and she really inspired us by making it a little bit more of a dark gothic cybernetic artwork. And that gave me some ideas for lyrics that connected to her visual idea of these songs, and that also influenced Bizmark, how he wrote the keyboards - which is a little bit more futuristic keyboards for those songs in order to make everything connect. And being without any limitations – as long as it's dark it's OK, that's what we usually say. If it's dark – it's alright. So the artwork really affects the arrangements; the arrangements affect my lyrics, so it's always a battle between all this combination of influences. So yes, it is something that we really treasure, and I think we will continue to progress that way – as long as it's dark, it will happen. And the lyrics are for me very open, I can write about anything, but there are some philosophic questions about life and existence that I myself indulge in, and they affect how I view artwork, for instance, or they affect the fact that we use choirs. It's all these things combined in parallel that makes Netherbird Netherbird. So the artwork really affects how the music sounds, and that's quite uncommon I think. So it's a super-creative and super-powerful process, and anything can happen. But it will never be pink, and it will never be anything but dark. But as long as it's dark, anything can happen. And as far as philosophy is concerned, I think life is the biggest and the most interesting point to think about. So yes, it will always be a very important part of what Netherbird is – it's the fact that we try not to limit ourselves when it comes to lyrics either.

I guess this is a very wide question, but still – do you tend to have full control over the creative process, or just let it flow and see what happens?

Creative process is the best kept open, I think. Anything can happen, and I try very hard not to interfere too much with the creative process. When an artist takes our music and gets some keywords from me in order to make some piece of art, I don't want to limit him or her too much by my ideas – I want them to make their interpretation of what this is about, because that inspires me. If I'd got a pink artwork, I'd say no, but so far it hasn't happened - so far everybody involved has contributed to Netherbird, so I would never limit it. We try not to be too precise, we let the things flow and then we'll see what happens. It's scary – it's really scary every time, because you never know what you're gonna get – but so far I've been blown away by the fact that since we do not limit our guest musicians, we do not limit artists – we get more in return than we would ever be able to create ourselves. Because they are experts in their own field, for instance if I take the artwork for *Boulevard Black*, it is made by a girl in the US called Marion Hermann, she made her own interpretation of *Boulevard Black*, and I was blown away by it. Or the model Bleed For Me, she makes her own expressions in the art in the way she poses, and that

also becomes Netherbird. It's more than we could ever create. But to be honest, we have the veto – we have a certain limit to what could happen, but that limit is very far away if you would compare us to another band, I don't know. But I think as long as it's dark, it's Netherbird.

I must admit that your lyrics are simply stunning – as long as I really care for this point and always pay attention to this part of songs, this is something I mentioned right away. They're really very visual and vivid, and they make you create pictures within your head. I won't ask you to describe your lyrics, let's encourage the listener to make his own point of what it's all about, but I just want to ask you how much is it entangled with what's going on in your own life? In other words, how much of real Nephente is behind these lyrics?

All of it, I'd say. I don't pretend when I write, I just write stuff that matters to me. I could most likely point out episodes in my life that are basis of these things, but since most people are not interested in me – they're interested in themselves, at least I hope so, because I cherish people for who they are, - I try to write it as open for interpretation as possible, because my lyrics make sense when you or somebody else listen to them and make their own image, can connect themselves to it. And I don't know if I succeed or not, I try to my best to create lyrics that make sense to me, I try to use words I understand, I try to describe feelings that I feel, but they're brutally honest, to be truthful. And some of them are really painful to me to leave them to the public eye, because it says a little bit too much about me; sometimes I feel very vulnerable when I write them. But I try to at least spare people the more personal parts of it, so I try to at least stay clear to some of my own problems. But to be honest, at times I'm a troubled soul, and I write to heal myself. So the lyrics are bluntly honest, but I try not to make them too much mine, I want them to be open to the listener to make them theirs. Just as the best songs I know, or the songs that I made mine when I read lyrics. I would never compare myself to the truly great people that have inspired me, so I try to do it a little bit different. When I was younger, I wrote very complicated stuff – too complicated I think. I used hard words, just in order to show that I know the English language. As I said, now I try to make them as simple as possible, and as to-the-point as possible, but also trying to use some imagery, of course. Because really they are not my lyrics, when I let them loose on Netherbird they are the listeners' lyrics. So that's a big responsibility for me. But they're very personal, and I could never fake lyrics – if I'm supposed to sing a song, it must make sense to me, otherwise I could not perform it even in the studio. Even if it killed me, I couldn't make it feel honest if it wasn't honest. So it's bluntly honest, and I'm blessed with a fact that the band respects that the lyrics are my sacred possession. I would never write lyrics that they couldn't stand, but I would never change it – then I'd have to toss it all over and do something completely different. So they respect that, and so far they are cool with it. Perhaps it's an awkward thing to say, but sometimes I do really explain what I mean just in order to let the other guys know what I'm thinking when I'm writing. Just so they're not kept in the dark, because they must know what this is, why I'm saying these things. But I would never say it to anybody else – they have the right to know just to be a part of it, because lyrics are a part of Netherbird, and they are a part of Netherbird. But they're also the only ones to get that explanation, but that explanation is without a point to the listener. Listeners' interpretation is the true meaning of the lyrics.

Well, I'll also go bluntly honest and say that now these lyrics have a very deep meaning to me as well – it's hard to surprise me with someone's writing when it comes to song lyrics, but you managed to do that somehow.

I'm blown away by that fact, thank you kindly! It has happened that people write to me and ask me if their interpretation of a certain phrase is correct. And whatever their interpretation is, it is of course correct. That's the best answer I can give to anybody, if it makes sense to them, then it's correct. You cannot read lyrics and get it wrong. But I guess as a metal band we perhaps

have a little different lyrical theme than most of bands have... But it's really hard for me to judge my own lyrics. But I can tell you that much, I put a lot of energy into it and I'm really focused on saying things that I think matter. But the tribute is when people hear it, and they think it makes sense. And I'm humbled every time somebody does get something from it. I cannot ask for more.

And what actually inspires and motivates you in life?

Not to answer something clichéd like "life in general inspires me", I'd say people inspire me, of course. I look to the past masters for inspiration, I look at Goethe or whatever – I mean I get the inspiration from most things. But then for me writing inspiration comes from I tend to pile up things: I read things, I see things, and then inspiration comes when I'm at ease really. And then all of a sudden I take my little scrapbook where I have small lines or thoughts written, and then I can write perhaps half a lyric. So this writing process is very slow, I can't just write lyrics for another album in two days. And it's not the matter of finding the words, finding the meaning is what takes time for me. The process is this, too bluntly honest: when I get the demo for a track I listen to it many times, perhaps fifty times. And then I find a phrase that I think is the title of the track, and that title will stick. That's why we use rather metaphorical titles for songs – it's because, what I said, is a theme for a song. Then I write something that makes sense for that theme, so – that will sound strange that I'm inspired by myself, but that is really how the process is. And then I must be at some junction in life in order to write. Lyrics are hard for me to talk about, really, but I write on pure inspiration from life. Most of the time when I'm in the writing process, and it's going to turn out to lyrics that would make it, it's the euphoric state of mind, it is - because all of a sudden something that appears blurry to me appears plain, clear-side. So I write for myself as well, because those lyrics are really some sort of process for me as well. Sometimes I'm really, really amazed myself when I read them – not because they're good, but because I didn't see it clear before I wrote them.

What also shines through every line, is some sort of art heritage, some certain ground of art and deep thoughtful research. So can you name some piece of art that is especially meaningful to you by making some impact, that in a way lies behind your creative vision?

The most important artist to me ever... I will try not to use a musician. I think actually that might sound a bit lame, but it's Shakespeare, because it's the beauty of language and it's the fact that he presents moral dilemmas in a very beautiful, but also very human way. So I think Shakespeare would be my most beloved inspiration.

If we already started talking about art in different forms, can we now pass on to the video you've made for *The Blackest Breed*, especially that painting that is created by the blindfolded artist. So who actually created it, and whose idea lies behind that video?

The video concept is really Bizmark's. I'm the executive producer of the video, because I pulled through the location for the shoot, and also I coordinated the visual artists, the post-production artists. But instead of making something that streamlines between me and Bizmark, he has a lot of visual ideas, he's a great thinker, so I actually jumped to the backseat when we made the storyline for the video. So it's really Bizmark's vision of Netherbird at this point. That painting... I mean *The Blackest Breed*, the song in itself is rather a symbol; what we try to decipher with the picture – that the blacker we are, the more innocent we are, I think. Perhaps innocent... or honest. It's really a celebration to the outcast, and people fear us so much – us, people fucked-up. We wanted to use the image of a blond, very innocent girl as the epitome of the video – instead of making it Nephente, the black-haired guy with strange clothing. We decided to say that the center of attention is that innocent girl. So that's the basic concept of the

video. The painting itself is painted by Bizmark, who's the creative guy (laughs). So that's the story behind the video, it's really Bizmark's vision and idea of this song, and I think it turned out great. Well, most of the time we don't lack ideas on anything we do. We have too many of them, we have ideas for hundred videos impossible to shoot, impossible in every aspect. But you have always to be a bit.. I mean, we're not funded by big labels, we pay it for ourselves, so we always have to find stuff that works a little bit like my lyrics – instead of doing impossible stuff, we try to do the very possible – but make it honest. And the video is a very honest attempt to capture who we are. The concept is perhaps a little bit hard to see, but it's also just a rock video, so if you're interested it's there, if you're not interested – it's just metal music. And we tend to sound very pretentious all the time, but it's not really complicated. We are just a fucking metal band, as well as a band that has a lot of thoughts and ideas. So if you want these thoughts and ideas – it's there for you. If you just want to headbang – it's there for you as well, and we don't judge.

Well, the next thing is probably not a very common thing to ask since it has no relation to metal music, but it really helps to better understand it on a more personal way. Who was your most favorite book character when you were a child?

Damn, you throw me off guard! (laughs) It ain't Hamlet, that's for sure, he's indecisive, I don't like him. You know, I'm an old roleplayer, so I can say I did always play high elves, because they were tall and they were shooting bows; they were perfection in esthetics in a way. But if I have to pick a character that would not be Legolas, no, it wouldn't. Actually I've always been very fond of the bad guys, the darker the more I liked them (laughs)... I think it's the most interesting question I've been asked in my entire life, perhaps also the hardest...

That gives the meaning to what I'm doing!

Well, my most favorite figure in literature would be Gandalf from Tolkien's work of art, because he's timeless, he's wise, he's also very, very aware of the shadow that looms the world. And I think, to be honest, if I would ever have any quality of any person, alive or dead, Gandalf the Eternal would be the one. That is my honest answer to a very, very hard question. Gandalf is a universe in itself, he speaks very little, knows a lot. Sometimes I just feel to be the opposite of that (laughs), but I think the timeless qualities of Gandalf as a character are what I feel the most inspiring.

Gandalf the Grey or Gandalf the White?

Gandalf the Grey, I'd say. Gandalf the undecided. Because Gandalf is neutral when the story starts. When he is reborn as Gandalf the White, that's a Jesus figure, I cannot relate to that. But I can relate to Gandalf the Grey, the neutral teller of things to come, and the wisdom that he possesses. I'm very interested in the Tolkien universe, though Tolkien was a devoted christian, he was catholic, and quite obviously I'm not. But he decided it animated, he created a universe, and that's something you must respect. So, Gandalf.

Speaking about the future, do you have any visual concept of how the Netherbird show will be like?

Yeah, I have a lot of ideas! As I said, Bizmark is a very visual guy, and I'm as well, but he's very driven when it comes to the aesthetics of it. We'll do our best to convey what Netherbird is about also visually. One of the things that we will try to – I cannot give you any details, but the audience is Netherbird, I've always said that and always meant that, honestly – so the audience will be very much a part of the Netherbird live show. And I'll make sure that the live show extends from the stage into the room. And also the fact that we pay a lot of attention to details...

But then it's always, of course, the balance between your visual idea and what is possible to do in reality, because every venue is different, every promoter is different, but if we get the chance, we will make Netherbird an entire concept and we will make sure that everybody feels very included, because Netherbird is not a band – if I have to say, the 95 per cent of Netherbird is the audience. That's where the magic happens. So we will make sure that the audience is included in the live setting of Netherbird. And I can also assure you that you will not hear us tune our guitars or drink water in between the songs; it will be a very thought through - not pretentious, but thought through show that will hopefully leave everybody with an experience like “that was a magic night, that was a unique moment” – because it will be, I will strive very hard for that. I know what I would like to achieve, but then it's a question of us being also very extreme metal band – so we don't have all the money in the world, the gig promoters don't have all the money in the world, so we'll have to do our best with what we've got. But I'm pretty certain that will appear like the band is trying to make everybody feel as a part of what's happening. Of course it all depends – if you're a support act, you cannot outshine the main act, it will never happen. But when the day comes when we are the main act, we will make sure that 1) the support act feels very much included into the family, - and 2) that the audience also gets some feeling of “What happened tonight was unique, and I take this with me for my entire life”. So we will have a very clean setting, and we will also have a lot of artwork, and projections, and everything going on live, which is, I guess, again kind of rare for an extreme metal band, but I've seen Tool perform live, and I was blown away by the fact that they pay the meticulous attention to every detail. And can we make something that remotely resembles what they did – I mean, of course, they express their own ideas, but what they really do is - they give people the sense that they treasure the fact that they went there, they did an extra thing, they just didn't pull on their standard t-shirt and went on delivering some rock n'roll songs. They actually make people feel like: these guys have worked really hard to give me an experience. And I can assure you, we will do the same. Without giving anything away I can say: you know the mixing console, I mean the tower behind the stage – why doesn't anything happen there? We'll make sure it happens. I like the old arena bands – I don't like their music, but I like the fact that Jon Bon Jovi was out in the audience, because he included them; when he was traveling by wire he included everybody – because he was out there, he was not this center stage person, and everybody was just looking at him travel out to the people. And that's what I want to make everybody feel like, just as an important part of this night as Netherbird is. Because they're all Netherbird, we're just the musicians.

And now we'll travel back to the present moment and discuss the latest happenings within the band: so what are you currently into, and what are the nearest plans for the band?

The nearest plan is that we will finish recording a cover EP that we started to work on way back with a drummer from Switzerland called David Preissel, where we will cover four tracks of our musical past. That's really important to us, and we will release that for free on the internet if it's legally possible - but I hope so. Otherwise we will release it under a fake name (laughs), I really don't care, and it should be out there because I want people to have the possibility to discover new things through our music. Because I'm so grateful to these artists we are covering, that no amount of attention to them is a problem. So that is one thing that we're doing; and currently we are also just finishing up which songs are on the next album, and which will happen on the third album – because we have been very creative for the last year, so we've been writing constantly, and we have too many songs done. And when we thrown all the songs that just felt 90 percent right, we still have too many songs for the next album. So we have almost two albums written that we feel make sense, and we feel are honest, and that we truly feel have a decent chance of making sense to people. So we will start recording that album soon as well, and it will take its little time, but it'll be out somewhere during 2009. And we're already well on a way to also make the 2010 record become reality. That will be one EP that will see the light of the day hopefully before or somewhere around the New Year's eve, just as a little token of appreciation

to our listeners because it's been a while since we released *The Ghost Collector*, and we gave them something that makes a lot of sense to us. Then hopefully during next year we'll find a way to release the next album which is currently untitled. Then we will hopefully also start recording the next one, and the reason for us feeling that we really need to get this album out is that we really want to perform live, close to the people that care about our music. So we need to get that out of our system in order just to focus on the live shows. So that's the main focus.

Also besides of Netherbird you are known as the singer for another band, Fear The Future. So can you just tell briefly, what's happening now within this act and what's actually the perspective for that?

Fear The future was the band that I have limitless admiration for, because the main guitarist of Fear The Future is the old bassist of Benighted, the band that I formed in 1993 – so he's a very special person to me. Fear The Future was the first thing that brought me back to extreme metal, and they're all my friends. We are a very low key band – no media, no coverage, no nothing – but they're my friends, and we make some music that makes a lot of sense to me and to them. Fear The Future has been in little bit of a stasis for a while, but it can be a new EP coming up. And also to break some news I would say that Grim, who used to be a part of Netherbird, is also writing music, and I would not hesitate for second to add my vocals to the stuff he does. He's a great friend of mine and Bizmark, and I'll do anything I can to make him achieve his artistic goals as well. Netherbird is my absolute priority, but I will never fuck up my old friends by not being there for them when the things happen. And I still care a lot about Fear The Future, and I really hope we get another EP out, because it will be killer.

And now it's a bit imaginative – if you had a chance to become a shadow of any person, alive or dead, who would it be?

Except for a super hot girl in the shower... If I was to be a shadow of anybody... It's a second best question I've been asked, I think, ever. Can I be brutally honest, I would love to be the shadow of Quorthon when he recorded *Twilight Of The Gods*. That's my honest opinion. That would have been worth everything – there are a lot of people who I would like to see during, but to me that's magic what I experience with that record. I would have wanted to see how *he* felt when he had laid the acoustic guitars for *Blood And Iron*, for instance. Or any track on this record, because that made a mark on me that will never go away. So it would have been quite awesome. I'm sorry, it can be a little bit cliché, but it's one of my biggest influences as well in a way I cannot describe to you what those albums did to me and my perception of what real good music is.

And now – what will be your message to your Russian readers who followed us during this conversation?

My first message would be that I am so fond of our dear neighbor to the east, that I will really, really look forward to seeing them at our gigs. But also to the fact that we are, to be honest, very humbled by the fact that we got this chance to speak to listeners in a country we know a lot about but we seen so little of. And we hope to change that very soon. I will make sure that they feel seen and included in what we do, and there is no limit to the care that we give to the people that will listen to our music. And if they really want to try that out, they should just add us on MySpace and tell us something – I will respond, because we are about to give Russia something to think of, that will be really interesting live. So we look forward to that, and let's have some beers together!

Well, this ‘final message’-question is used to be the last one, and it’s a logical point to stop, but I have something more to ask you in the conclusion. It’s also imaginative, but don’t take it too literally. It’s a very common motif in music and in the art in general – the search of light in the darkness. But as for you and for Netherbird, what is actually more difficult – to search for light within the darkness, or to find this precious, inspiring darkness inside of what is counted to be the light?

Oh, that’s a metaphorical question in itself! I’d say I have a harder time finding dark within the light actually, than light within the dark. Because the darker the skies, the brighter the stars, right – I mean, it’s very easy to find the light sources within the darkness. But in the daylight the shadows are always seem to be secondary to the sun. I really think I would like to darken the sun for the daylight rather than to darken the stars at night, to be honest.

If I have easier time finding darkness within the light? – There are more shadows during the day, so yes, it’s easier. Do they make sense to me? – I’d say I prefer night time and I prefer the fact that there are no shadows at night. I like a shadowless state – me being a shadow, it’s a wonderful thing. It’s a very strange answer to a very straight, but very interesting question... You once again do challenge me quite a lot. But there is more shadows during the day than in the night time, so there is more dark at the daylight, than light at night time.

Now I’m only left to thank you for your precious time to make this interview happen, and to wish you everything the very best, and I’m quite sure that for a lot of listeners your music has already become a kind of Lighthouse Eternal – and a lot more of them are still to follow!

I’m humbled by this, and if we can make anybody Russian-speaking care about the music we do and if we can make some contribution to their life, we are humbled beyond belief. And I really mean this, because Netherbird is nothing really about us holding the instruments, it’s about the people who listen to our music. Because the beauty and the art are created by them, not by us - we are humbled by this fact, and I really look forward to gigging in Russia at some point. And I’m also humbled by the fact that Metal Hammer Russia gives us this wonderful opportunity – I’m humbled beyond belief. And I’ll make sure I’ll treasure that respect and that opportunity when the time comes, and I can promise you, I will spare no energy when it comes to delivering something that is worthy of Russia and the Russian listeners. Let’s hope for the best and work for the even better.