

Interview: Ancient Rites
Made for: www.metal.de
Questions: Proserpine
Answers: Gunther

01.) You just released your live CD "And The Hordes Stood As One"... just in time before your next tour. Was that intended to make the fans hungry for more? :)

Our label came up with a request for a live album. To be honest at first we were not too enthusiastic about it. However, after giving it thought we felt that after four studio albums and 15 years of hard work with A.R. the time indeed could be right for a live registration on cd/dvd. Only under our conditions and with a good budget, in order to offer a quality record in good old Metal tradition when live albums were an important step in a bands career, not a "quick something in between". Our German producers from Spacelab studios came over with a mobile studio, a P.A. technician from Holland was hired and our Finnish video producer came over to direct the video recordings which were taken care of by a Flemish camera team and a Flemish light technician was present to handle the visual aspect on stage. A very loyal and diverse crowd attended the gig, people from the Flemish, German and French speaking regions of the country but also fans from Germany, Luxembourg, Holland and France were present. In typical AR tradition it was an international event.

02.) Are you yourself satisfied with the album and do you have information how the press sees "And The Hordes Stood As One". Do you like to read reviews for your own work at all?

The atmosphere was really fantastic that night and the interaction between band and audience fabulous. Very rare at an extreme Metal gig to hear a crowd sing the lyrics louder than the music or clap their hands during medieval the Folk parts. The reactions from the press are very positive, many interviews due to this release. Naturally I am interested in what is written about our work but it does not influence me.

03.) How did you perceive the gig in Vosselaar...was that "the gig of gigs" or at least a very special one, not only cause of the recordings?

It was a night I will always remember and cherish. I am glad that event is "immortalized" by audio and video teams and will be released to share it with our fans worldwide. We have already played bigger clubs and festivals but that particular night the mood was perfect.

04.) Why did you chose to take the gig in Vosselaar for your live-recordings?

As a location to record our live cd/dvd/video entitled "And the Hordes Stood As one" we chose Biebob Club. This place has a great sound and a long tradition as a club where many known and unknown cult acts have performed. It is a place where we usually present our new albums on stage for the first time.

05.) Will you play the same/a similar tracklist on your next tour?

Yes. The upcoming tours/gigs are intended to promote the "And The Hordes Stood As One" album therefore a similar track list appears the most logical choice to us.

06.) The upcoming tour is together with Thyrfing, Septic Flesh, Primordial..etc. Do you think that this is a good package? Are you looking forward to make a European-tour again?

I think it is an interesting package. Of course it is up for the people to decide if this tour will be worth visiting or not. During the late 80's/early 90's EVERY underground gig was crowded. Today people are more selective and prefer to go to bigger festivals where they get to see tons of famous bands in a row. That old underground spirit is somewhat gone. Therefore I always tour without expectations. At least our tours always were successful enough to continue: I know of bands who were send home from tour because not enough public interest. Must be really humiliating. We, as a veteran band, have slowly built up a worldwide underground cult following over the years and this is what keeps us on the road. Young hyped bands who got famous overnight often do not have this loyal back up as their status was built upon the latest fashion. Our die hard fans are not influenced by trends. Tour life is hard but intense and interesting. A good opportunity to dwell around my beloved ancient Europe and to meet A.R. troopers from everywhere...

07.) You also recorded a DVD with live-material. Why isn't it released yet?

Our label decided not to be involved with the DVD any longer. Because of financial disagreements between HammerHeart (our label) and S & P (the production company) the DVD is delayed. This might influence the success of the release in a negative way. Now S & P will have to try and find other channels/companies to distribute our DVD in the shops. I hope they succeed. A pity, really. This communication breakdown is to be regretted. Not only from a bands' point of view but also the fans might have a harder time obtaining the release. I hope the DVD will still find its way to the fans as easy as the CD (HammerHearts' distribution is fine but we cannot count on that now!). Success of a release also depends on distribution. Hammerhearts' withdrawal is a decision I do not understand and I must confess it feels a bit like being left in the cold. Labels and I are usually not a good team. I look upon matters from a musicians point of view. Record companies usually are on the opposite site. This whole live cd/video was an idea of our label in the first place therefore I find their decision rather peculiar. If I would run a label I would applaud one of my bands releasing a professional DVD even if I had to share the profit with another company. Guess my logic works in different ways but then again I'm a lousy business man and I don't know details about what went wrong between both companies. This music industry sucks.

08.) What will the DVD contain apart from the Vosselaar-recordings?

The DVD will also include extra footage: a video history of the band (excerpts from European tours throughout the years). A special on one of our tours through Finland. A picture gallery. Two video clips "Victory and Valhalla" and "And the Hordes called for War". Interviews with band and fans. A special on our appearance on DYNAMO...

09.) What was important for you as you recorded the live-material?

To forget about all the camera's and the recording mobile studio but still play/sing as precise as possible as it simply had to be good.

10.) If you look back: Was Dim Carcosa really your breakthrough in the metal scene?

I guess it was. Larger crowds are attending our gigs since the release of "Dim Carcosa". I must admit I have to smile when the very same journalists who never believed in our work in the past suddenly praise ANCIENT RITES. But I am not the type of person to wrap that in their faces, I think deep down they know that I know. Specially it is rather peculiar that they praise the very same songs on this live album they always claimed to dislike. It is indeed a bit like a "triumph" I enjoy in silence. Not that I mind critics or that I lose sleep over unfair reviews (we are used to not being treated favourably) but I have the memory of an elephant and recall details far too well. An advantage of our years of hardship/underground battle and slow growing process is that we have

build up a more solid basis and a loyal underground following worldwide. 15 years have passed and ANCIENT RITES are still here, stronger than ever, while hyped bands who reached fame & success overnight by using all kinds of commercial tricks, have disappeared. To talk in metaphors: our career can be compared to a Panzer. A heavy and solid tank, slowly moving compared to the much faster and more glamorous light cavalry, but still there and on the move when the fancy cavalry is blown away by enemy forces .

11.) What do you think of "best-of-albums"? Would you think it is time for AR to release such an album with all your outputs?

There already is a "best of" on the market released by our previous label entitled "THE FIRST DECADE" focussing on the first ten years. I liked the album but it was rather incomplete. Our drummer (who joined the band after the demo and therefore is also a veteran within our ranks) and I disagreed on the choice of material. Since we are a democratic band we met halfway: I settled for one demo song to be included (on which he did not appear as it was before his time) and our drummer got his way not to have any ep recordings included (on which he played drums and from a musicians' point of view finds too weak sounding). Personally I would have included more demo and ep recordings as I can imagine new fans to be interested to hear the very beginning of the band and even old fans might be interested to obtain their old sold out vinyls on cd. I think more like a fan I guess.

12.) Cause of Bart's departure you had to use many different guitar-players as replacement for your Headliner-tour. Do you think that that would still be possible nowadays to save a tour?

Our old material was far less complicated. Temporary replacements today would face a far more unreasonable task. On the other hand because our band is more known today we would more easily attract professionals fit for the task.

13.) Your main-theme is often "Europe" in general. Why do you think do people tell false things about Ancient Rites (like political incorrectness etc.), although you work(ed) together with so many different nationalities. Do you see an explanation, why you are still banned from some places? (Is that still true???) I think that is quite outrageous.

It is most of all is rather tiring. In these modern Political Correct times people who celebrate ancient traditions are considered suspicious. It is rather tiring as I never claimed superiority over any other tribe but simply expressed my passion/interest in my own culture and European heritage. Without ever disrespecting any other. Still, for many it is enough reason to start boycotts. Well I can't just simply deny my roots or ancestors in order to please the PC brigade. I travel the world which I think is enough proof of my universal approach BUT do not demand from me to despise my own background. Songs like "Fatherland" express a sincere love for one's homeland, from an emotional and historical point of view not from a political/economical one. It is presented in a way that no matter where a person is born he can relate to the feelings I describe. I attend celebrations and rituals organized by Heathen and Pagan organizations who are restoring ancient traditions. Most participants usually celebrate these events in a religious way, my approach is rather a historical one. My interest/sympathy for ancient and medieval European history/culture is genuine and goes back to my childhood. My teachers admired this passion and historical knowledge of mine and it got rewarded. Today it is not accepted anymore, tradition has become an ugly word. I did not change, the world did. How to explain then we have such a large following in Asia, South America or the Middle East if we are as extreme as some people say? In these times when the world is ruled by political correct dictatorship it is considered suspicious to write about European history, culture and heritage. Our critics forget we also write about universal matters or display a respect to ancient

cultures and civilizations from all over the world, including non European. Those who accuse us will only be pleased when the entire world, including ANCIENT RITES, are waving “hip” Che Guevara/ marihuana flags, praise Stalin and look/talk like neo hippies. Yes, I am a European traditionalist. No, I do not consider other tribes inferior. Not that difficult is it? May be one day my words will be clearly understood? We have a verb in Flanders saying: “If one wants to hit a dog a stick is easily found”. The more popular we become the more jealousy we are confronted with, the more gossip is being launched. No matter, it proves we are important enough to talk about...

14.) Are there already ideas/plans for your new album? Anything you can and like to tell me about like concept, changes etc.? :)

We do not plan our sound or deliberately try to achieve a certain style. Every ANCIENT RITES album differs from each other. Our sound constantly evolves and yet all releases are undeniably ANCIENT RITES. Of course there are elements in our music that have become a steady part of our style. We will be constantly cultivating our sound to reach higher levels. We wish to create an atmosphere which helps the listener to enter the long forgotten worlds we describe. I presume those who appreciated “Dim Carcosa” will not be disappointed with our next work but do not expect an imitation either. Everyone is separately working on new stuff. But we have not heard each others ideas yet. For now we concentrate on promoting this live cd/dvd. After the forthcoming tour to promote “And the Hordes” we will concentrate on a new A.R. album. Time shall reveal how the end result will be. When we start working on an album there is no master plan. The final result often is different from how the songs sounded in the rehearsal room or on demo but that keeps the writing and recording process interesting. Songs which sounds very aggressive can turn out to be the most symphonic on the album and tracks we considered less extreme can reveal their extreme character in studio. We are rather unpredictable. Often our recording/writing process is like building a puzzle and we can see the end result after the work is finished. I have several topics in my mind, from the ancient Mithras cult (old Persian cult which was spread amongst Roman legions and tradesmen) via ancient Goths to the Spear of Longinus.

15.) You are a part of the scene since ages...are there still things you like to reach...or aims that are still to come?

I do not have any expectations, dreams or goals. Years in the scene have opened my eyes for the hard reality and ugly aspects of the music industry. This vision has not silenced my hunger to create, though. Nor does it discourage me, one can persist without expecting to win the war. I love to play this kind of music and will continue to struggle for this band despite external factors of whatever kind. Keep on creating albums I believe in and will not be ashamed about when I look back when I have turned old and is a nice idea. And a worthy goal. Ambition I still have but I don't live on a cloud.

16.) Pretty early you stopped to use warpaint. Was that a natural step, cause your music changed?

We were one of the first to use corpse paint and still are not opposed to it but felt indeed quite early that the ancient cult feeling surrounding war and corpse paint was not as strong/genuine anymore as it used to be during the early years of the B.M. scene. I think paint still could fit our music. It was the situation that made us decide to drop the use of paint, not our music.

17.) You will also play at the Wacken Open Air this year... there are many metalheads who maybe never heard the name "Ancient Rites". Do you think that big festivals are a chance to reach more and different people or do you prefer smaller gigs at clubs?

We have toured throughout Europe and the U.K. many times, played the Middle East. Since the release of "DIM CARCOSA" we draw larger crowds nowadays while in the past only very few individuals were interested in our work. Our status has improved. This has taken us to the stages of big festivals where one can reach with 1 show as many people as on a whole club tour. This is a huge advantage. Negative aspect of playing huge festivals are the lack of soundchecks and limited playing time. Often the sound on big festivals is not optimal. One has more control over the quality of the show when playing clubs, as headliners there one can sound check and try to get the sound in balance. And achieve a closer contact with the audience. Actually both live situations have their particular charm. What I enjoy when playing big open air festivals during the evening/night is the tremendous amount of oxygen available on stage, a luxury indeed! Certain clubs can be very claustrophobic without any air conditioning that one literally feels sick on stage due to a lack of air and extreme heat. I remember playing the Middle East in summer: extreme hot temperatures, no air, people packed inside, no water to refresh... We were sweating so hard it looked as if we had taken a shower. Before having played one note! I remember how we felt goose bumps as a reaction to too much heat on stage and our bodies having lost too much water. Some of us throwing up after the show because of exhaustion, almost paralyzed on stage because of the extreme heat, stuck in our leather clothes. Unbelievable. I know Scandinavian colleagues who had to interrupt their show when playing South American clubs in summer as their bodies could not deal with the extreme difference of temperature. Rock'n roll my friends! Now I know why there are so few Metal bands in Africa ...It's advisable to play Cool Relaxed Jazz over there and not wear leather on stage, haha!

18.) I thank you really much for your answers and wish you all the best with Ancient Rites. Also good luck for the tour, hope it will be a good one for you. Maybe we'll meet in Essen. ;) But now it is up to you to end the interview. Any last words or things you'd like to mention?

The pleasure was completely mine, my friend. My best regards to our German fans. Good luck with The Dark Site. Hope to meet you on our forthcoming tour.