

I picked up Lo-Ruhamah's "*Anointing*" album because of the mysterious, intriguing artwork, without knowing the band. I expected some orthodox *tour de force*, but the sound of Lo-Ruhamah has a lot more to offer than a blend of death and black metal. I suspected that the band would have a lot of interesting things to say, so I contacted the band. This whole interview is being done with guitarist Matthew Mustain, and reflects his perspective on the questions asked. (JOKKE)



**Hello Matthew! Since I was not familiar with your band, I would like first to go back to the inception of Lo-Ruhamah, before discussing the new album "*Anointing*". First, what does the exotic band name mean and represent?**

It was a name that Jonathan had used in a previous project that didn't actually publicly release anything. We went back and forth between different names in the first year, but we all settled on Lo-Ruhamah because we liked its sound and basic meaning. The name is that of the child of a prophet and a prostitute, and is an archetype of rejection. Literally Lo-Ruhamah means not pitied, without mercy, unfavored, etc. There's a lot you can draw out of it, but I personally like the imagery evoked in the marriage of a divine mouthpiece with a whore.

**What were your goals when Lo-Ruhamah was formed in 2002?**

Things started out very simple. Jonathan and I met first, and we were just excited to find another person into death, black, and thrash metal. Metal's had a bit of a resurgence in the last decade, but back then you met people mostly either at shows or by dumb luck. We tried playing with some different arrangements of people. I remember trying to play with at least one other bassist and drummer, but neither of them were a good fit. Not too long after Harry came along and was a great fit. Our goals initially were to play brutal and heavy death metal, but after we wrote a couple of songs in that style we decided it felt way too regimented and limited. After that we branched out into the style you can hear on the 2005 demo/EP and let things grow from there. I've often thought it would be fun to go back and record those earliest death metal songs, but I'm not even sure if we'd remember how to play them these days.

**In 2005, you released a self-titled EP and two years later your debut "*The Glory of God*" came out. How were both releases being received at that time? Did you do some touring to promote the album?**

I don't really remember getting too much feedback at all honestly. Adrian Bromley (R.I.P.) from Unrestrained Magazine in Canada was a big fan and supporter, and so was Erik Thomas from Teeth of the Divine. We played here and there around the time of those releases. No big tours or anything. Just regional shows and a couple of festivals. I remember playing at different times with more nationally known bands. We also played quite a few dates with bands of friends who never released any recordings.

**With an album entitled “*The Glory of God*”, that came out on the Christian black and death metal label Bombworks Records, it’s easy to pin Lo-Ruhamah as a Christian death/black metal band, although I read in an old interview that you averse being labeled as a “Christian” band. So what is the philosophy behind the band and that album?**

That’s a fair question and there continues to be some tension and ambiguity over how we relate to those kinds of labels. I feel like the tension that exists on both sides is pretty appropriate, so I’ll just leave it that way.

There’s not really a driving “philosophy” behind “*The glory of God*”. That whole album was simply rooted in our spiritual experiences and was a cathartic way for us to exorcise a lot of things that were heavily weighing on us at the time. We’re all in pretty different places a decade later as we’ve all changed and grown as people. Our thoughts, questions, and priorities today don’t match what they were during that time, but I know we all stand behind that album and are very glad to have had the opportunity to make it.

**I can assume that some people will not give your band a chance, just because of the fact that they might think of you as a Christian band. Did you receive some negative reactions on this matter?**

Not really. It just keeps coming up in interviews.

**Between the debut album and the new one is a gap of nearly ten years. What is the reason for this long period of silence?**

Endless issues surrounding the recording and its completion, as well as a lot going on in our personal lives. None of us would have imagined it would take this long to get the final product, but I also know that to arrive at the place that we are, with the album presented as it is, it took exactly as long as it did. We are all happy with the final product, so ultimately the amount of time that it took doesn’t matter that much to me.

**I read that the band moved from Missouri (USA) to Estonia. What lead to this decision? How can you compare living in the States with living in Europe?**

Just Jonathan is in Estonia. He’s mentioned to me that he really likes how quiet everything is there compared to America these days. People are just so incessantly loud here for the most part. He’s working toward his Ph.D. and has been living there for about four years now I think, which has required some long distance collaboration and recording with certain aspects of the album, but all of the band parts were recorded together. We don’t want to lose the dynamics between the instruments because of distance, so we always will prioritize getting together to record the final versions of the songs.

**Your new album is being released through I, Voidhanger Records, a small but decent record company that houses some great bands. How did you come in contact with them?**

I wouldn’t call it a “decent” label, I’d call it a great label. I know the label through some of the bands they’ve put out like Howls of Ebb and Skáphe, but our main connection was through the cover artist

Elijah Tamu, who had been corresponding with Luciano of Voidhanger for some time. I sent the album around, and Luciano was the one who was the most excited about it. He continues to be really supportive and great to work with.

**The new album is entitled “Anointing” what refers to applying oil to someone as part of a religious ceremony or choosing or designating someone by divine election. How is the album title related to the lyrics or concept of the album?**

Some of that is intentionally veiled, and I think that the meaning and progression of the album is pretty intuitive as you move through it. But each person will find different aspects to connect with. Some of the lyrical themes listed in the press release for the album are pretty accurate, so I’ll just repeat them here: the dissolution of reason and the human mind, enlightenment, desperation, self-destruction, will, visionary experiences, cosmic ruination, and the lines between humanity and divinity.

**The record is also graced by an amazing cover by Elijah Tamu. What does the artwork represent?**

Elijah spent a lot of time with the lyrical themes and the musical progression of the album. The ideas were really important to him in creating the cover, and he put in way more time and effort than most artists would. It was an incredible experience and we are beyond pleased with the result. The art seems to capture the whole movement of the entire album in a single image. It’s really an unfathomable accomplishment to me that someone was capable of doing that, and for it to be so stunning.

**Your logo is very mystical but very hard to decipher. Who drew it and what does it represent? Why did you not choose a more readable logo?**

The logo and symbol-work for this release were done by Elijah as well. He had a lot of freedom to approach making them in a way that he felt best represented the music. The whole approach was intentionally impressionistic. The “readability” or obviousness of the logo wasn’t important, just like the lyrics and other visual imagery aren’t obvious. Things that are very spelled-out don’t tend to make very good art.



**The songs on your debut album often surpassed the ten minute mark and the record clocked in at over 60 minutes. On “Anointing” the average song length is around 4 minutes with a total running time of less than 40 minutes. Were you tired of writing long songs or was it a natural process/evolution to go for shorter tracks? Didn’t you write more music after 10 years of silence? “The glory of God” was pretty ambitious in its length and scope, and I remember that after releasing the album and playing shows with that material being the bulk of our set list, we all wanted to do something different. It felt like a direction that didn’t really need to be refined and moved deeper into. We wanted to recapture some of the immediacy and aggression that was on the demo songs, but with a more mature songwriting approach. We also wanted to more rapidly and succinctly move through ideas to keep things almost a bit more suffocating and disarming.**

**Although the new songs are more compact, there is still a certain ebb and flow dynamic in the songs which relates to the post-rock genre. How would you define the music of Lo-Ruhamah and what bands do you consider as the most important influential ones?**

The way that we tend to describe the band is just as death/black metal, and all the other interesting add-ons have been from other people. It’s always entertaining to see the types of terms that get attached to the band to try to more clearly define what we’re doing musically. I hope that means that we’re doing something interesting, if it’s not so easy to categorize.

**When the album progresses, the vocals alternate between death metal growls and schizoid howls, which I like very much. Are those frantic vocals related to the theme of the songs in which they appear or the words they sing?**

Yes. The progression of the songs is closely tied in with the lyrics and with the vocal performance. It’s all a very intentional movement from the beginning to the end of the album. For me personally, that was the most challenging part of making the album: making the music and the thematic progression move together without losing the natural flow of the songs. It took a lot of effort in the arrangement but I feel like we were successful.

**What is in your opinion the biggest difference between the debut and the new album?**

For me, the debut was about exploring textures and soundscapes, as well as broad and sprawling lyrics about the vastness of the universe and our place in it, our relationship to the Ultimate, etc. This new album...well the terminology has already been used elsewhere, but to me it communicates visionary experience and religious ecstasy, but caught in a hazy swirl of hallucinogenic pharmakeia. It’s frantic and immediate. The first album is pensive, and this one is unsettling.

**Are there plans to re-issue the EP and debut album now that you are being signed by I, Voidhanger Records?**

As far as I know those early releases are still floating around in distros, so there’s not too much of a need. Of course I would love to see them released in other formats like on tape and vinyl, but for now we’re focused on this new release.

**What will you do to promote “Anointing” and will there be a vinyl edition?**

The label will promote the album as that’s what labels do. We’re currently working on some new material to be recorded this summer for an upcoming project. Luciano has promised to do a vinyl version later this year, so we’re looking forward to that as well.