

NEXION – GAZING UPON THE FACE OF THE ABYSS

Alongside some of the already established Icelandic bands such as Svartíðauði, Misþyrming or Sinmara, the volcanoes on the imaginative island have also spit out some new bands in recent times. Nexion is one of those newcomers who have the potential to impress on an international level. Just listen to the quintet's debut long player "*Seven oracles*", an impressive statement of raging Icelandic Black Metal. We had a long and engaging conversation with front man Josh Rood. (JOKKE)



(c) Void Revelations

Hi Josh, first of all congratulations with your debut album "*Seven oracles*" that will be released through Avantgarde Records on Summer Solstice. Due to the impact of COVID19, some bands and labels decided to postpone the release of new albums. Did this ever cross your mind or is Summer Solstice an important day for the record to be released, no matter what?

Hi, and thank you. Yeah, the thought not only crossed our minds, it festered there for a while. There was a period of time when the entire industry was thrust into a chaos that none of us had any experience with. So, nobody we spoke to had much of an idea on what sort of course would be best. Most bands who have postponed their releases are well established and depend on their album release tours. As a new band, we aren't in that same position, so we decided to release the album and hope that it does decent. There is something horribly prophetic about our proclamation coming during a Plague Solstice, but that release date happens to be how the cosmos willed it.

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When looking at the line-up, it immediately became clear that you are no native Icelander. In 2013, you decided to go study at the university of Iceland to obtain a degree in Old Norse religion. Why did you specifically choose this Icelandic University and what will you do in a professional way with your degree?

No, I am no Icelander, haha. I chose the University of Iceland because I had been accepted to a very particular program which specialized specifically on Old Norse Religion. The program is overseen by Terry Gunnell, one of the greatest researchers in the field and one whom I look up to tremendously, and very few people actually get accepted into that program. So, it was an opportunity I could not pass up. As for what I will do with it professionally. I don't think that way. I pursued my degree as a course of passion and spirituality. To wake the dead and accept their wisdom. This is Odin, and it is also what drives me. Opportunities are presenting themselves to me anyways. I am currently working as producer of the lecturers for the metal festival Midgardsblot, and I am networking with people involved in cultural heritage. If I land a career protecting and developing ancient heathen sites, then I am very happy.

What attracts you to religions and more specifically the old Norse ones such as Ásatrú? Did you become interested in these topics through listening to (Black) Metal, where these themes are often being used?

I didn't get into it through Black Metal, no. And you might notice that Nexion is not about old Norse Religion or Ásatrú. It is about mankind's position in the universe. I wouldn't say I am attracted to religion. But from an early age I realized that myth and ritual are an inherent part of humanity. From the moment the first people decided to bury a family member

instead of leaving them laying there to rot. From the first moment we looked up at the stars and began to wonder, or the first cave painting. We perform rituals. We tell myths. We create and uphold narratives and sacred ways of looking at and interacting with the world around us, and with looking into ourselves. And what sort of myths and rituals we experience reflect and shape our subjective reality... What I am attracted to is the fact that the human experience is shaped by these things. And when I was very young, I decided that what Christianity is, is a virus. It infects societies and replicates until everything in that society is become it. I wanted to dive into the cultures that it killed. Due to a number of personal reasons my path ended up being one tied with Old Norse Religion.



(c) Stormd Photography

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Is it merely a deep interest in old Norse religions that you have or do you really “believe” in gods and spirits?

“Belief” is entirely irrelevant. If you were to go to native or indigenous religions and ask them if they “believe” in Gods and Spirits, the question would confound them. Gods. Spirits. Devils. They are real, because we invest them with the power to influence. So, my connection to gods and spirits is less an interest and more an acknowledgement that they have agency, and a desire to tap into that agency.

In the [Nordic Mythology Podcast](#) that I listened to, you mentioned that you now live in Norway. Why didn’t you stay in Iceland what would probably make it easier from a band point of view?

I never planned to stay in Iceland. I planned on being there only 2 years, but got stuck for 7! It was just time to move on. I have more work opportunities and project opportunities in Norway than I did in Iceland. From a band perspective, we don’t find it very inconvenient. The cost of shipping and moving equipment from Iceland is insane and it’s good to have a member in mainland Europe. Sort of a Home Base, so to speak. It’s easy and inexpensive to travel to and from Reykjavik for shows and recording. Song writing can be done through sharing and streaming files with one another. Many Icelandic bands have members who do not live in Iceland.



(c) Eydisklara Photography

How is life in Iceland and Norway compared to your upbringing in New York?

Well, I am not from New York City. I am from the foothills of the Adirondack wilderness in Upstate New York. I come from a place of endless forests and mountains. In that sense, the weather, the nature, and the landscape is extremely similar in Norway to where I am from. I also now live in the forest instead

of the city. So, I feel very much at home here in Norway. Iceland was less familiar for me. I lived in a city, there were no forests, and it rained all the time. On the other hand, both Iceland and Norway are more fitting to me as an individual, because of my passions, projects, and general outlook. I have no plans to return to the United States.

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Before moving to Iceland, you played in a death metal band called Fenrismaw. Was it immediately clear that, when moving to Iceland, you wanted to start a band over there? Was Nexion a band that already existed and was looking for a vocalist or did you start searching for musicians to form the band?



(c) Eydisklára Photography

Actually, I remember proclaiming that I was “retired from singing” when I left

New York for Iceland. Fenrismaw was a struggle for a number of reasons. By the time we put our album, “*Helcult*” out, we were exhausted. We recorded it so as to have a testament of what we had done, and then washed our hands. We didn’t attempt to sign it or get a distribution deal. We just finished it and walked away from it, which is a shame but we just didn’t have it in us anymore. So, I was a bit jaded going to Iceland, and didn’t plan to do anything music related. But over the next year or two I began to grow, I guess “hungry” is the word. I am a vocalist because it is a catharsis. The process of physically becoming, and projecting the spirit of whatever music I am creating is something which I need to do. And so, I decided if an opportunity presented itself and if I connected to the members and the project, I would agree. A friend of mine called me one day and told me that two of his friends were forming a new band and needed a vocalist. I agreed to meet them, and that was the beginning. Jóhannes, Óskar, and myself. We worked with a few musicians until we ended up with what we feel is our quintessential lineup, which is who we have now, on “*Seven oracles*”.

Nexion is, like the majority of Icelandic black metal bands, based in the capital town of Reykjavik. How is your relationship with the other bands in the local scene and do you feel any kind of competition?

I don’t really know what our relationship is with other bands. I think we are too new for that. As individuals we have friends throughout the scene, which is to be expected because it is a tiny world in the Reykjavík metal scene. But as a band, we haven’t really forged any relationship. I am not sure if we feel “competitive” or something else, but I know we are hungry to establish ourselves and create opportunities to perform.

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Nexion's musical style depends less on dissonance compared to most of your countrymen and focusses more on aggression and brutality, but at the same time without losing the melody. What are some of the bands you consider as influences on Nexion's music?

You know it has been interesting to read reviewers try to compare us to other bands and guess our influences. Often it feels like people hear something in us because it's something they want to hear, and it tells me more about what that person listens to than my own influences. Music is subjective like that. We never sat down and decided what we wanted to sound like. We wrote music and let it shape itself. But nobody works in a vacuum, so absolutely we are influenced by the musicians we listen to and perhaps have worked with. That is to be expected. But it has never been a conscious thing. What we decided was that we were going to write music from within, from below, and not from above. And what that means is that we wanted our music to boil up from that primal, wild, untamed emotional and creative space, and not originate from an intellectual position. So, we never said "we want to make music that sounds like X, Y, or Z. And we ALSO never said "we want to create something experimental that nobody has heard before". Both of these positions are intellectual, and from our perspective, stifle creative and emotional expression. We let our chemistry flow and wrote what came from that place. I think the result is something that probably does not attempt to hide our personal and collective influences, but it is also a purer expression of our emotional and creative forms.



(c) Eva Alexandra Photography

A "nexion" is a kind of occult gate or portal. The term is, for example, being used by the Satanic and Left-Hand Path occult group The Order of Nine Angles to describe its various groups or cells. What was the main reason for choosing this moniker?

We chose the name "Nexion" because we felt it exemplified our desire for our music, while it is pouring out of a speaker, or from our bodies on a stage, to wash over and destroy the bonds and chains that hold ourselves and our listeners to the state of being which society upholds. Let us open doorways to higher, or lower, states of existence. More emotional and more primal. More ecstatic...let terrible powers peer through them at us, or in line with Nietzsche, let us gaze through those doorways and upon the face of the abyss. That is what Nexion is all about. The word "nexion" really just means gate or portal to someplace else. The Order of Nine Angels have published works explaining their use of the word, but we have nothing to do with them.

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The song *“Revelation of unbeing”* contains some quotes taken from the Book of Revelation. What meaning has the Bible for you, knowing that you grew up in a very evangelic household?

“Revelation of unbeing” takes the idea of an all-powerful, all ruling Christian God, and spits on it. The Christian Bible is a product of man, wherein man has carved his own, unthinking tyrant and placed that UNBEING on a throne over mankind himself. And lo how entire societies, nations, and empires have shaped themselves for that deity and all that it represents. And see how man has suffered, and bred suffering, for that deity. The bible is a testament to self-inflicted slavery.... *“Revelation of unbeing”* is a dialogue whereby, if it were at all possible, that deity has its own revelation.

“Seven oracles” is, just as the majority of Icelandic black metal records, recorded in Studio Emissary. I’m sometimes afraid that this might create a pile of generic and similar sounding bands such as is the case with Sweden’s Abyss Studio and Necromorbus Studio. However, Stephen Lockhart seems to be able to keep each bands’ own identity. Did you, prior to the recordings, have your own view on how you wanted the record to sound?



(c) Jónas Haux

Of course! We knew how we wanted it to sound and Stephen worked very closely with us to ensure that the sound we wanted was what we got. I am not a producer, but I believe that the reason studios tend to produce many similar sounding, generic bands, is less because of the studio, and more because once a studio has a reputation for having a sound, or producing particular types of bands, they attract countless swarms of imitators that want to sound like bands which have already been through those doors. Stephen is very willing and eager to work with different kinds of bands with different kinds of sounds, so we weren’t worried.

How do you look back at the recording process and are you still 100% satisfied with the outcome?

We are. We learned from some of our mistakes with the EP in terms of saving time and headaches, and we found new challenges with recording this album, which I think is normal. But after the album was given the breath of life, we can hear it and be satisfied that the experience and process which birthed it has not failed it or let it down.

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After just one look at the stunning artwork of José Gabriel Alegría Sabogal, it became immediately clear that there is more behind “Seven oracles” than being just a mere collection of seven songs. Can you shed some light on the album’s concept?

We shared a little bit which Avantgarde has on the website description of the album. Please feel free to include that. I prefer not to subject our expression to too much clinical analysis beyond that. The album has its own voice that we hope allows it to speak for itself. But I will say this. Our works are treated as continuations of each other. Like chapters or books belonging to the

same scriptures. The EP, the opening piece, establishes the beginning, the end, the eschatology, and it is a reflection of the cycles of life, of time, and of myth. The Seven Oracles then follow that, and they are concerned with existential knowledge. You should expect what comes next to build on that.

The lyric booklet contains a quote from German poet and philosopher Philipp Mainländer stating “The knowledge that life is worthless, is the flower of human wisdom”. The nature of existence, human value and the meaning of life seem to be central themes in your work. At what age did you become interested in these themes and was there a specific occasion that ignited this interest?

For me it has been a theme in my life since I was very young. There was never a point where I began asking questions and deconstructing the existential structures that our societies, religions, philosophies have erected. It is just how I have always been. What has changed is my access to knowledge. The more you read, the more you explore, and the more you think, the more you develop.



(c) Jose Gabriel Alegría Sabogal

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The final song on the record, *“The last Messiah”*, is named in honour of the Norwegian philosopher Peter Wessel Zapffe who is noted for his philosophically pessimistic and fatalistic view of human existence. The song title refers to one of his essays in which he presents his thoughts regarding the error of human life. Zapffe's view is that humans are born with an overdeveloped skill (understanding, self-knowledge) which does not fit into nature's design. The human craving for justification on matters such as life and death cannot be satisfied, hence humanity has a need that nature cannot satisfy. The tragedy, following this theory, is that humans spend all their time trying not to be human. The human being, therefore, is a paradox. By using the four principles of ‘isolation’, ‘anchoring’, ‘distraction’ and ‘sublimation’, mankind tries to avoid facing this paradox. Do you share his nihilistic views and do you practice his four principles?

Well, his principles were not meant to be something that you “practice”. They are simply the four categories he used to describe how people try to avoid facing the paradox that you just described, needing a purpose and needing answers. People fall between and use all of these to varying degrees. Isolation is essentially ignoring and refusing to think about such things. Distraction is pouring your energy into something else, like video games, books, music. Anchoring is an



(c) Jose Gabriel Alegría Sabogal

attempt to give oneself a code, or a belief or a purpose in order to hide from the truth. Religion, or ideologies and “causes” serve this role. Sublimation is when you face it. When you peer into the abyss and allow it to shape you. Our music is Sublimation. I don’t agree with all of Zapffe’s arguments, but his overall perspective is something which I very much share, and I do think his four principles are a very useful illustration of the relationship which people, all people, have with existential panic.

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Some bands give the artwork creator no limits. You, on the other hand, worked very closely together with José Gabriel Alegría Sabogal for the artwork creation. Were you (or was he) not afraid that this would limit his artistic freedom?

I don't understand why a musician would not want the artwork to embody their vision. Jose can draw pretty much anything and it would make an amazing cover, but what we needed was for the physical format to reflect, interweave with, and become the music and the message. We have a great relationship with Jose, and what is most important to me is the creative and personal chemistry between us. It isn't a matter of us telling him to



(c) Jose Gabriel Alegría Sabogal

draw something. He is involved. He gives wisdom and insight. His ideas have influenced our music in the same way that our music has influenced his images. I think we have a very good process and it doesn't feel limiting. I have asked him if he feels limited or stifled but he has assured me he isn't. We were quite "hands on" about ideology and symbolism for the covers, but for the interior, we asked him to take the role of a sacred scribe. We discussed the concepts, gave him the lyrics, and he understands them to be a sort of unwritten gospel which he was tasked to bring to life. The results speak for themselves, and he assured us that he enjoyed the process but you'll have to ask him if he meant it, haha.

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You also collaborated with him for the artwork of the 2017 self-titled EP. Why is he the perfect artist to visualize what Nexion is all about? Will you continue working with him for future releases or are you open to work with other graphic designers?

I don't often meet individuals with whom I can discuss, explore, and create expressions of wisdom in such productive and exciting ways. So, for that alone Jose is someone I would want to work with as much as possible and as long as the opportunities present themselves. I also believe in continuity. There are thematic elements which have continued between our EP and Seven Oracles which Jose understood innately because it has been his own work. But life is messy, and it might not be possible for us to always work together, or perhaps our creative paths will take us in different directions at some point. Let's see what happens.



I assume that you are very eager to climb on stage to promote “Seven oracles”? Off course, COVID19 and its aftermath create a very uncertain outlook for future live shows and festivals. Do you think we will ever be able to enjoy live music in the same way as prior to the pandemic or does the nihilist in you think that live will never be the same as before COVID19?

I think life will return. It always does, in one way or another. My concern is timing. Most festivals are booked for the next year because they are “delayed” from this summer. That means it is going to be difficult for up and coming bands

to get on anything for the next 2 years, and by that point “Seven oracles” will be two years old. We are very hungry to be on stage and to spread the Proclamation of Seven Oracles, and I think we have been shown great support and reception, so I think we can find a way to get something going. If not then you'll see a very bleak and destructive follow-up In a few years.

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