

Interview with **James Stewart**, drummer of polish death metal band **Vader** (KVLt magazine, Piotr Czwarkiel)

1. Hi James. It's pleasure to talk with you. When and how did you start playing drums, and how did you know that "this is it!"?

Hi! Thanks, it's always awesome to meet other people that are as passionate about metal as we are! I started playing drums at school, more just because I was curious. I didn't have any desire to be a drummer or anything but when I tried it, I pretty much decided immediately that this was something I really wanted to do for the rest of my life.

2. Please tell me when did you start listening to metal music? Which band was first and which album did you "minced" tirelessly?

I began listening to Metal when I was around 10 years old. Like almost all metal fans my age, it started with Slipknot. I picked up a copy of the single 'Wait and Bleed' and I played it pretty much on repeat for 6 months straight. After some time I got into heavier bands and eventually discovered Extreme Metal, which is where my taste has settled for the last 15 years or so.

3. When you discovered Vader and which longplay is #1 for you?

I first found out about Vader when they released 'The Beast' in 2004. I think it's a pretty underrated album because it's not as fast or aggressive as the earlier material but it has a really cool thrashy sound – and still compared to other bands that I was listening to at the time it was very fast and aggressive! I found out about 'Litany' pretty soon after which totally blew my mind. I had no idea drummers could do that! But I'd say now that my all time favourite Vader release is the 'Sothis' EP. Amazing songs, great production and the playing is totally relentless!!

4. How do you feel about being a part of the legend of death metal?

I have been a fan of the band for over 10 years and Vader meant a lot to me while I was growing up so really it's just great to be a part of something like this!

5. Do you remember the day when Peter invited you to join Vader? How was it?

The day itself was pretty stressful. I sent the audition videos to Pete and then I just had to wait. I had an email sometime during the morning after and I was told I'd be joining the band. Pavulon had agreed to stay on and finish 'Welcome to the Morbid Reich' which gave me the time to finish my university degree and prepare everything for going out and touring professionally. It was a lot to do in 6 months!

6. When you started playing in Vader, did you have problems with any songs to play or were you prepared very well? Some Vader songs are extremely fast, especially those (for me) from Litany album.

I was never really much of a blast drummer. I did it a little, ages ago and I always loved extreme bands with a lot of blast beats but I was mostly playing Thrash Metal. The blast songs were a huge challenge for the first couple of years and can still be a challenge now. I try and make all the new songs a challenge for myself in some way because otherwise it gets boring but now the challenge is more about making each fill unique and interesting in some way, while still being appropriate musically.

7. Did you feel pressure for taking a "chair" over the legendary Docent? Have you ever seen him playing live?

I never saw Doc play live and honestly, I rarely think about the pressure of taking over from him. I love his playing, especially on the earlier albums but I realised very quickly that trying to play like Docent would only prove that I wasn't him. So I decided to try and take his ideas but play them in my style –

to make myself part of the music and not just copy the drummers before me. I think that this approach has mostly worked out but I guess that's not for me to say.

8. Before you join to Vader you were playing, and still play, in Divine Chaos. A year ago you joined Sceptic. You are an extremely busy man. How do you do it? If it's not a secret how your day looks like? Do you have a "typical" job?

Vader is of course 100% priority and we play a lot of shows but there is still plenty of downtime between tours for me to be busy with other projects such as Divine Chaos or Maschine. I have drummers that fill in for those projects while I'm away because it's the only way to keep them running. At the moment Hiro is very busy with KAT, Wera is doing a lot of shows with TOTEM and I'm about to start a heavy touring cycle with Vader so organising the 'Sceptic diary' is not easy but I'm sure we'll do something sooner or later!

9. Vader is one of the most live band in Poland. Since you are the drummer in Vader, you have visited many exciting places in the whole world. Which one made the biggest impression on you?

I guess Japan has always been my favourite country to visit. The crowds are crazy, the food is incredible and it's just unlike anywhere else in the world. We're going back in a couple of weeks so I'm very excited!! That's not to say we haven't been to other cool countries and all of them have had something to offer but we don't always get enough time to experience everything. We're there to entertain people after all, not go sightseeing ;)

10. Regarding to touring around the world. Have you had any extremely unpleasant situation. I mean during travelling or during gig in "exotic" places?

Touring will put you in whole lot of horrible and difficult situations. Most of the unpleasant situations involve promoters not paying or having to cancel shows because of simple things (inappropriate backline/stage conditions etc) that could have been avoided much earlier if we had been notified. When these kinds of things arise, the band often look like the bad guys for pulling out of the shows so it's always a tough call. I hate it.

11. Lets switch the subject, any positive surprises on tour?

The positive aspect is that most of the time everything runs very easily, the concerts are super fun to play and the fans are still ready to see and hear Vader. That's the only way we can carry on putting up with the times when things don't go to plan.

12. In June this year you entered Hertz Studio to record material for the upcoming full length album. Vader will also release EP Iron Times before LP The Empire. Do these songs differ in something? Is EP a kind of introduction for 'The Empire'?

'Iron Times' was released a couple of weeks ago and it includes 2 songs from the album and 2 covers. The EP is a taste for the upcoming album 'The Empire' without giving too much away. There are plenty of surprises in store and we can't wait to start playing more new material live in the coming months!

13. Recording session was a kind of easy, typical challenge or did you work extremely hard? 12 hours per day? How was it?

The recording session was pretty demanding this time because we put in a lot of attention to detail. We always work from 09:00-19:00 with a break for lunch so it's a pretty solid 9 hour day. The hard part is trying to keep the energy at a high level for 9 hours per day (it takes a lot of coffee!) and the music is very physically demanding so it is a very draining process. It was a lot of fun and the drumming has taken a huge step forward but I'm also very happy it's over!

14. Did you have "free hand", or did Peter influence your parts?

In the studio, we all sit down together and prepare a rough version of the song so I know where to play a blastbeat, skank beat and fill etc. and then after that I have almost complete control on the details. I really tried to test my limits of 'free reign' on this album with some crazy fills just to see if Pete would say 'No, that's too much!' but he never did and we kept them all. Now I just have to figure out how to play them!

15. For me latest album is more accessible than previous stuff like Litany and De Profundis (my favorite by the way). How could you described new material? Continuation of Tibi Et Igni or something more brutal and fast?

'The Empire' has definitely retained something of the previous few records but it also has a bit more aggression that can be heard on the earlier records. The drumming definitely has a really aggressive edge to it compared with Tibi et Igni. I'll be interested to find out if people like it or not!

16. What do you like the most in being a member of the band? Creativity during writing process or touring and giving gigs ?

I definitely prefer the road to the studio. It is all fun of course but there's nothing like playing live to an audience every night! Honestly I think I'd go crazy if I wasn't touring all the time!

17. How is your „god of drummer” and why?

I have many drumming heroes but I guess my all time favourite is Benny Greb. Awesome player with very tasteful and comprehensible ideas and he is a super nice guy too. Other great drummers worth noting are Buddy Rich, Steve Gadd, Dave Weckl, Vinnie Colaiuta, Virgil Donati, Gavin Harrison and George Kollias. Lots more of course!!

18. How do you receive polish fans, people in Poland? When you were playing shows in Poland, did you have a possibility to visit some famous places or were you running just “from one club to another”?

Polish fans have always been very friendly and hospitable towards me and I really do feel very comfortable in Poland. Of course there is the added sentiment that Vader is Polish and the fans have a lot of respect for this. The last Blitzkrieg tour in Poland was very well attended and we're hoping for the same with the next one in autumn. When we tour Poland we have even less time to ourselves than usual because there are so many extra things to do such as interviews, signing sessions or in my case drum lessons so sightseeing is almost impossible. It is something we try and make time for on days of but sadly these are very rare as any day on tour without a concert is very expensive.

19. James, thank you for your time and see you on upcoming shows in Poland this autumn. Bye!
Thanks bro! See you soon!!!!