

Two giants of Enslaved and Wardruna joined forces to make metal and folk as one. Thanks to this, the world first got the incredible Skuggsjá, and its equally well-made successor, Hugsjá. After their first tour, they talk about how it came about to their cooperation, where they get inspiration from, why black metal is not true kvlt anymore and... why a combination of science fiction and folk music isn't actually a bad idea.

Hello, first of all I'd like to thank you that you've managed to find some time for an interview with KVLt-magazine. Let's begin from the end then: not such a long time ago you finished your first real tour as one common project. What can you say about this tour? What kind of feedback did you get from the audience? And was there any gig you've waited for in particular?

Ivar: It was a really successful tour, even though it was short. But those six concerts was enough for us. Tickets were sold out in many places. We got a really great feedback every night. Of course we had hoped it'd go well but... it really exceeded all our expectations! Every gig was special in its own way. And because we did maximum one gig per country, there were many visitors from other cities who really waited for this moment. It's hard to pick one particular concert, though... but we can surely say that Cracow was one of such special nights, yes.

I was there and I have to say it was a magical night... thank you for that.

Einar: Thank you. Well, in Norway we did a lot of gigs with our own material but we decided that it can be interesting to show it outside of our country as well. You never know how it can go... but we're really happy about the whole tour! It was a success worth a retake.

Was it planned that the tour would be so short, or were there any obstacles in making it bigger?

Einar: No, it was supposed to be this short. It's a bit like me and Wardruna: we give concerts for one or two weeks, and that's it. We prefer to do something more often than longer.

I think that all your fans await something more in the future! But let's go back to 2014 now when you performed together for the first time at Eidsivablot festival – now Midgardsblot. It was your Wardruna playing there, Einar, your Enslaved, Ivar, and the two of you as Skuggsjá. This is how you celebrated the 200th anniversary of the Norwegian Constitution. How did it look in the back room? Was it actually the idea of the Norwegian government that you'd create something together, or was it your own initiative?

Ivar: Yes, it was like this in a way. It was Akershus county which was responsible for organization of this festival in Eidsvoll – the same place where our Constitution was signed in 1814. And so they sent some kind of commissions to some people to prepare something about the freedom of speech. This is how they wanted to put the topic about the Constitution into art. And we were just lucky – however, it's actually quite logical they wrote also to us, that they talked to both Wardruna and Enslaved because our bands have this inner concept. We're engaged in history and topics related to it. So, when they asked us, we said yes straightaway. It's quite interesting that the Norwegian government gives commissions to artists to criticize something which is the foundation of this very government, don't you think...? Quite a bold offer.

I remember you talked about this back in Cracow, and I couldn't believe my own ears! But this is how your history began, and it's been five years today. First you released a great debut album *Skuggsjá*, which means *mirror*, and last year, quite unexpectedly, you surprised everyone with the latest project, *Hugsjá*, which means *to see with or through mind*. What is the difference between these two projects for you on a more personal level? What is the difference between the message on both albums?

Einar: Both, but in different ways, tell about reflection over history and tradition. It's a journey through traditions, a combination of the old and new in a way that ideas from the past are transferred into the present context. But more personally... hm, the journey began with *Skuggsjá* which was kind of a more defined project before we even started making it. It was supposed to be a combination of *Enslaved* and *Wardruna* which turned out to go together so well in so many ways that only when we got the possibility of making something new together, did we want to bring it to a different level, to make something different. So we brought all our experiences from *Skuggsjá* and when we discussed what we wanted to do this time, we discovered that we wanted to enter a more acoustic sound landscape. This is how music which I've never heard before was created, the expression I myself have never heard before (laughs)! It's taught us a lot and I think that working on *Hugsjá* was inspiring for both of us.

Ivar: It sure was!

How did you get the idea on the name *Skuggsjá*? Has it something to do with the book *Konungs Skuggsjá* from the 13th century, which tells about politics and morality?

Einar: *Skuggsjá* is the Old Norse word for *a mirror* or *to reflect*, it has double meaning. We thought that this is exactly what we wanted our music to represent. And *Hugsjá* is the word connected to a thought, using your mind to see more, or just *to remember*. So no, it's not connected with *Konungs Skuggsjá*, even though this is a very interesting book too.

I see, let's then go a bit further in time. You both come from the same black metal environment. You, Einar, left Gorgoroth, and your *Enslaved*, Ivar, took a whole different direction. Do you still feel any influence from these years? Or was it something which brought you together?

Ivar: Yes, in a bit metaphorical way. For me it was, how should I say it... it had something to do with some kind of freedom and independence which black metal used to have back in the early 90s. But for me it's the end of this era. I have to say that for me personally black metal is dead. And that, how was it called... *Lords of Chaos* movie [movie about black metal directed by Jonas Åkerlund], it was like a final nail to its coffin. I'm over this, this light which used to be there is gone. Sure, there are bands like, for example, Taake or others, who hold to the idea, but for me black metal as a whole movement is burnt out. There's nothing left out of this independence and uncompromising criticism of religion and society. But musically speaking... the way you attack the music, erm, in the old days when someone released an album, it'd become the genre in itself. A new album of *Immortal* was released some time ago and it's already a different black metal subgenre. It's some kind of an inspiration to me in a way, but black metal as a genre isn't something important to me on a daily basis.

Einar: And I'm thinking here about this mentality. This idea isn't something new, because it existed in punk, in world music, even in classical music. What's left in me from the black metal era is that the idea behind the music is equally important as the music itself. I mean... ideas and lyrics or views are equally important.

So did you feel some kind of hunger to create something different and new back in the day?

Einar: For me, Gorgoroth was only a job, it was art obviously, but it was nothing personal. When I finished with metal one day, I broke up with it for some many long years. And in reality my mind and heart were somewhere else. So yes, for me there was this kind of need to create something new or rather something which would be of bigger personal importance to me. Something which I'd be passionate about – and it's grown in me more and more. That's why I decided to end this era and start anew, and concentrate on something which would mean a lot to me.

Ivar: It was like that with Enslaved too, in a way. That "hunger" was there in a way or another. We work very hard on every album or album cover, same as we work on its music or production. And when it's done, there is this hunger to do something new. It's hard to grow very far from your roots, you know, it's a bit like in a dance... sometimes I have this impression that something we released in 2017 lies closer to something we released in 1991 than something from 2015... and the other way round. Music just permeates in all directions. It also explains why we managed to play together for so long in a quite stabile lineup. It's a bit like a scientific project: we don't know yet how it's going to sound like when we start recording the new album, but we have some idea. And we put a lot of effort that this new project is its own driving force, that it develops naturally, and we just join this journey.

And yes, when it comes to your songs... both in Wardruna and in Enslaved language plays a huge role. As a linguist, I'm interested in this topic, as in your songs you use both Old Norse, Nynorsk and your own dialect from Western Norway where you come from. I've read that you worked with a group of language experts on Hugsjá.

Einar: Yes, in this way we want to portray this oral culture, speaking tradition which existed a long time ago, back when words had a much bigger force than nowadays. There's an incredible power in a language and words. And what we do is play with words in a way that... we play with it so that we choose a word which may have a bigger power in Old Norse or just it brings a better phonetic sound. In a way it creates a bigger distance to words in our lyrics. I love working on that, also because it's a bigger challenge for the listeners and for the power of the message in our songs. You know, when you tell a Norwegian or a Scandinavian one of these old words, they may not understand its meaning but they're going to understand its power and message. Its essence in what it sounds like and its relation to the language nowadays. So this is what we actually do: language play. We reflect these times and traditions when words and language or words in poetry were very important.

That's very interesting and it plays a musical role in your songs. But let's go to a visual part. You've been asked many times what your attitude towards Wardruna's and Skuggsjá's music being used in the TV-series *Vikings* is. It's a very mainstream series, but have you ever wondered where you'd rather listen your music? Another movie or TV-series.

Einar: I didn't actually give it any special thought (laughs). It's clear to me that different musical expressions have also a huge visual potential as well. In the musical landscape there's also place for audio-visual projects. But where I'd rather hear my music, I don't really know...

Ivar: What about some kind of science fiction? There are some common relations between mythology and science fiction. I really like it when a series based in the future uses older music, historically speaking. There's this series... well, there's a lot of this new science fiction where there's more of this special atmosphere. Not like Captain Kirk [from Star Trek series] who travels from one planet to another one and makes out with some green ladies. There's more stuff about humans, philosophical works full of interesting atmosphere. I saw, for example, Battlestar Galactica, and, who knows, maybe Skuggsjá would fit in there too.

That would surely be interesting to see! Nevertheless series and movies help spread folk music around. We're getting to the end, so I'd like to go back to the beginning of our interview. The gig in Cracow was special for me and many others, got many positive reviews and standing ovations... was it a special evening for you too? Can Polish fans count on that you come back here as one common project?

Einar: It was really special, yes. And even though I know I'm always a welcomed guest in your country, I always love this passionate, but also attentive audience. And of course, I'd love to come back and play here not once but twice again!

Ivar: Obviously, it was a great night and so many fantastic people came, even some Norwegians who visited us after the show. We also had a very cool afterparty! We both were in Poland many times before, and it's a very "hot" place for our music. We've known it for a long time, also in our "metal" times, but it turns out that Poland is open to every type of music and slowly becomes one of the most important places in Europe for music of every genre. I think I can guarantee that we come back with both our own projects and Skuggsjá or Hugsjá.

It's very good news, then! Thank you very much for your time, please continue on making your music, because it means a lot both for me and all the fans in Poland. See you!

Ivar: Thank you!

Einar: Thank you, goodbye!