

**Mat McNerney (Hexvessel, Grave Pleasures): "It's a very strange band but I really like it for that"**

If you combine catchy post-punk with lyrics focusing on nuclear disaster, the result is **Grave Pleasures**. Folk rock with psychedelic vibe, on the other hand, is one of the ways to describe **Hexvessel's** unique music. These two projects, which seem vastly different, exist thanks to the musical mastermind **Mat McNerney**.

Giving a listen to both bands makes it clear how the artist, also known as **Kvohst**, has no difficulties in composing material from diverse genres. In the interview for **KVLT Magazine**, the artist described creative process behind **Hexvessel**, underlined the importance of experimenting and explained why is it so fulfilling to play in a band which does not correspond to any predefined rules of any of the genres.

**First of all thank you for finding time for the interview and congratulations on releasing a new album! It's the newest full-length I would like to start the interview with. I have the impression that All Tree is a very straightforward, almost minimalist album. Was that the goal when you were recording it?**

Yes, there was a goal to show restraint on record. I wanted to use restraint as an element on the album, almost as important as an instrument itself. It was always a case of the initial ideas I wanted to carry forward in it, in as simplistic way as possible. The influences behind it came from the earliest forms of folk music which is always really honest music, very pure music and I really wanted to carry that through on the album. It was something that we've never did [with **Hexvessel**] and something I've always aspired to put into practice on a full album. For me, it was a real challenge to be able to do this and I felt that for **Hexvessel** also. It's an aspect of us that has always existed but has never really been taken forward to. So it was something new and exciting for me to be able to convey these ideas in a very minimal setting.

**Each of Hexvessel albums has different atmosphere. Do you like to experiment or do you have a clear vision of what to do when recording an album?**

It's definitely a bit of both. I always have a clear vision but I think that if you're a switched-on artist, you always allow for experimentations and accidents to happen. Part of the creative process is to work in a way in which you can allow those accidents in and you're comfortable. It's when you know when those magical accidents happen and when to leave them in. So it's sort of both, if you don't know the process and you see things happening you almost think that it was just one big accident. As if the album just came together and suddenly it was there. But of course there is an original idea and of course I always have kind of scaffolding in my mind of what I want to do.

But I think that with **Hexvessel**, since it's not a genre band like for example a black metal band in a predefined genre, I'm able to take it into direction which is just a very natural direction. It's a kind of music which has more of a personal aspect rather than a constructed thing within a set of boundaries and rules. It doesn't have those rules to it. I think somehow it has this consistency just by being very „me“.

**What does the vessel in band's name symbolise? Is it a sort of metaphor of creating music as journey?**

Yes, it is, a whole thing from the beginning has been a spiritual endeavour so **Hexvessel** is something which explains me and then also explains the expedition. "Hex" in a sense of spell but also "hex" is a way that "hex" is like a curse for me, being under a form of spell, a possession. It's like a vocation. It's like a calling, like this idea that you're so compelled and driven on and that's how I've been in music but I've never been really been able to fill the vessel properly.

Now when I discovered **Hexvessel** I started writing music for that it really fulfilled me in a way music

hasn't before. That was the idea, really, to make music I think is more spiritually fulfilling and I'm doing that especially with this new record. I think I've started to understand what I've been doing with this album, with this band since the beginning, which is very much how the old folk writers sought their craft. They sought it much more as a magical form of a passing down stories than just being in a band, they nearly took it as seriously as handing down knowledge. For them, it was like generational wisdom.

**In addition to concert in Tampere cathedral, this year you're going to play in such interesting places as Turku castle and the one-of-a-kind Roadburn festival. Which of those performances are you looking forward to the most?**

I look forward to every show. Of course everything is unique and what we really try to do with this album is to do shows where we've never played before, to never play the same venue twice. We've done tours before when we did three weeks in club venues and it was really not the right experience for **Hexvessel**. It's not the right experience for us and it's not the right experience for people who like our music and come to see us. So we try to choose venues like churches and places like that for this tour from this point onwards so that we get the right frame of mind for everyone from the beginning. I think that's the best way to experience the band.

Every gig is like a new challenge because in every city we have a different sized crowd and we have a different kind of crowd 'cause a **Hexvessel** fan isn't really like a one specific type of person. It's so varied and it varies from city to city, country to country. It's a very strange band but I really like it for that. I was thinking about it how bands get the fans they deserve. I never really enjoyed the fans of the bands that I've done in the past because it was dealing with negative music. I think that whatever you're telling in your music, you're gonna get that back. So the fans that come to **Hexvessel** shows are, you know, **Hexvessel** kind of people! They're usually the kind of people I would like to meet. So the gigs are something I look forward to. Gigs are about meeting people and I met a lot of good friends by going out and playing music with this band so it's cool.

**Do such venues really have big impact on the concert and make it truly special? I would say that the music and emotions speak for themselves and the chosen venue is more of a nice addition to it, how would you describe it?**

It's not really original to be playing these different venues. We're not the first band doing it, so many bands now have been doing this kind of special shows. But I think it really fits us and I mean that it's such a band that a lot of people would speak about a "ritual" instead of a "performance". And it can sound really cheap, even though for us it's obviously not cheap: for us it really is a ritual.

I can say that we take it really seriously and we take it as a holy thing, it's about expanding that aspect of performance. If you think of a show as a holy thing you want to be able to elevate that experience even more every time. And so I want to be able to kind of justify that feeling to other people. We're doing everything we can here to make this a sacred event. For example when we are playing in a very important building, there's something that happens to people when they experience music in a setting that also has some sort of magic to it. And I know that because I go as a fan to see something in a special place. It really opens things up. When I went to see **Anna von Hauswolff**, for example, we travelled from Germany to France to see her in this lovely little venue and something about that evening was just special. I mean this really nice venue and that very special performance with a lot of people who feel like-minded. There was a sort of transformation that took place and that's what I live for in music.

The venue and the music together tell a story. It's also about elevation, trying to get to a place where you're able to change people's perceptions, let the music do its magic, do its transformative work.

**I hope that this is exactly how music will work at Castle Party Festival in July. Have you ever been at this festival and what are your expectations for this event?**

Yeah, I hope so too. I'm really looking forward to that! It's a good show for us and Poland is just a really nice country for me and my music in general. We have a lot of fans coming from Poland, so we get an invitation to play there quite a lot. And when it comes to festival, people seem to really like it and that's usually a very good sign if you hear positive feedback from the festival.

**So you haven't been there yet?**

No. I've been to Poland but not to Castle Party. I think Poland is like the coolest place in Europe right now, fashion-wise. It seems like Polish people are the most interesting group of people. We travelled last year with my other band **Grave Pleasures** around different cities and I was like "wow, Polish people really know how to dress", they really have style, it's changed so much in the last ten years.

**When listening to bands such as Dark Buddha Rising, Carpenter Brut or Secrets of the Moon, to name a few, one can realise how often you cooperate with other artists. Is it something obvious for you or does cooperation work best only in certain projects?**

I was really happy to do that with friends and their projects, I like them all and they're all very different. I get a chance to do some good work that's not my own, a chance to work on someone else's things. So it's very different because I get to do something very different when working on other people's music. It's a real challenge and at the same time it's a real honour, I think it's like the highest form of honouring someone when they say that they would like my voice on their music. It's really nice to get asked to do it, you do it because to say "no" is... it's extremely rude, you know! (laughter)

And of course it's a great honour for me to be able to take part in it. So I've done those things and really enjoyed them on many levels, just as being able to give friends something back for their support and for the good music they do. Also, on the professional level as a singer it's a good challenge for me, I always learn something when I work on someone else's music, so I sort of learn something and take something from it that I can use on my own as well and develop as a musician.

**Would you tell something about one of your newest guest appearances: vocals on Scorpion Moonrise by Sólstafir?**

It was really great because they gave me a lot of freedom with that song and for some reason they chose my voice when they were making that song. So it was a really good project, I was honoured because we've been talking with **Sólstafir** about working with them for a while.

**Such song really turned out to be a good project. Thank you for the interview again.**

Thank you so much and see you at Castle Party fest.