

Last year, when a fellow webzine contributor recommended **Gaerea** to me, the Portuguese band's mesmerising black metal immediately caught my attention. I've been returning to their newest release over and over again and with each listen, I kept sinking deeper in the soundscape created by the band's enigmatic line-up.

It's worth mentioning that **Gaerea** are a young band – the black metal act has been founded in 2016 and **Limbo**, their second full-length, is an album which could just as well be a release from a much more experienced band. And we're not talking just about Portuguese bands here – what I have in mind is a much broader, international scale.

It's nearly impossible to suspect **Season of Mist** of releasing average and downright boring music – the label doesn't have almost any weak albums among their releases and **Limbo** is another proof for that. The very first sounds which open the album, **To Ain**, bear resemblance to **Behemoth**, but the band does not go for bland, "copy-paste" style or compose solely with the help of inspiration.

Gaerea have much more to share with the listeners and in **Limbo**, we'll find (or, to be exact, hear) a wide range of emotions stretching from pure anger and fury to despair and even devastation. The atmosphere of the album resembles an intricately built wall of sound rather than cacophonic mess and it can't be described as chaotic noise.

The further journey through **Limbo** takes us towards melody-tinged, but masterfully balanced sounds, which are more than hypnotising. In certain moments, the album has an atmospheric side to it while at times, a subtle melody carries us further through the music, although I couldn't point out a single moment in which this motif is exaggerated, unnecessary or simply sounds over the top.

Meticulously built wall of sound instead of chaotic overload of noise together with the album's aura of mysticism make me think also of **Schammasch** and their avantgarde, ground-breaking music. Partially howling, partially growling vocals which work perfectly in **Gaerea's** material could also be described as quite similar to the guttural vocals of the Swiss band – which is just another of the album's strong suits, since it resembles another rising star of the scene. When listening to **Limbo**, it's clear how everything has its own place there.

The songs don't lack gripping melodies, but most importantly the album's tracks are heavy and able to hit the listener with merciless force – such as monumental **Conspiranoia** and its drumming which builds the atmosphere insanely well. Each of the tracks in **Limbo** is synonymous with perfectly balanced, absorbing piece of music.

Gaerea hold the listeners in suspense until the very last moment and incredibly atmospheric **Mare** finishes the album perfectly, making me think of the Icelanders of **Auðn**. This over thirteen-minute-long beast of a song is full of powerful, slow melodies, at times enhanced with subtle instrumental parts – most importantly, it carries an enormous emotional load with it, which is simply mind-blowing.

Gaerea are much closer to more sophisticated, detail-oriented black metal bands which elevate their material to the rank of art than to raw black metal. In a subversive way, the Portuguese group keeps their line-up secret even though they clearly point to the direction in which their material is going – it's far from just soulless noise and instead, it increases the listeners' curiosity about the next album and still has something more to offer. The band will, without a doubt, prove it with their future releases.

I've been getting lost and wandering in **Gaerea's** compositions just as the madness-driven characters on the cover, who are crossing an endless desert, bog or possibly even the titular Limbo.

The cover artwork captures the ambiance of the album's entirety perfectly and it is without a split second of hesitation that I recommend **Limbo** to everyone who require something more from black

metal and who, in addition to heaviness and aggression which are so common in this genre, appreciate listening to a wider range of emotions and sounds.

Rating: 9/10