

HARAKIRI FOR THE SKY – “I’m writing all the time”

KVLT Magazine: Thank you for your time! Your Polish tour starts soon, so I really appreciate that we can talk.

JJ: We’re also looking forward to it. We’re really glad that to have such great supporting bands this time. I’ve always been a huge Celeste fan, so I’m very glad to have them with us. Another cool thing is that we’ve already played in Poland a few times, but this year, we’re also going to Gdańsk, where I’ve never been before. I’ve always wanted to see it because recommended it to me, I also saw in the pictures that it’s a great city, looking really beautiful. So, yes, we are also looking forward to this one!

Great to hear that! Have you played with Celeste and Sunken before?

No, I’ve just seen them a few times. Actually, I’ve seen Sunken once and Celeste, maybe three or four times. I’ve never played with them before, so it will be a cool package for sure. I think the audience should like it as well, because on one hand, our bands aren’t extremely similar, but they’re not that stylistically different from each other either. So this lineup fits really well for a show or a small tour.

Absolutely! I’m also curious about the setlist. Are you going to play new songs live anytime soon? After all, earlier this year, you’ve shared a few photos from the studio...

The album is nearly finished. We were in the studio to mix just around two weeks ago, so the album’s finally taking its final shape. But we won’t play new songs this time, we will start playing these when we move on to the release, I think, or maybe shortly before the new album is out. The release date should be around the new year, in early 2025.

We’re still playing a lot of songs mostly from the last two albums, Arson and Mære. Of course, we change the setlist a bit, but it would be difficult to make any big changes. That’s because when you are a band like Harakiri for the Sky, you end up with really long songs that are around eight minutes long, for example. Even if you play a headliner set of seventy-eighty minutes, you still have to deal with the stage time. I’m still curious myself how do we manage this when the new album is out!
(laughter)

Obviously when the new album is out, we’ll end up with some more songs again – songs that should fit in the setlist. This means we would have to kick out a few other ones from our setlists, so yes – there’s always a choice to make.

And it’s never an easy choice, I imagine...

Yes, it’s always difficult because the fans like other songs than those we want to play and the other way around. The fans mostly want to hear the songs they know well and the classics of the band. Let’s see how this works out with new songs. To me, normally, during the first two-three years after the album is out, I just don’t get bored of the songs.

Sounds like you’re satisfied with those songs and how they turned out.

Really, I hasn’t always been like that. Before releasing an album, I haven’t always been as hyped as this time. This is because we really took our time but still, it could always take more time, the work could always be longer, we could experiment more and keep working on additional features. So we just took our time while working on this album and I think that the songs turned out pretty well. There are some new elements in them, but we also stuck to some of our old habits musically. It’s still Harakiri for the Sky, you can hear it after a few seconds. It’s just that we amplified everything and stepped up our game a little. It’s just as if the heavy parts got heavier, the calm parts got calmer...

it's basically a mixture of alternative music genres, including the music styles that influenced us, such as grunge.

One could almost say it's like a manic depression with all the ups and downs. I don't know how to describe it better, actually! (laughter)

Amazing! I'm really looking forward to hearing it. Will it also be released on your long-time label AOP records?

Yes, we'll stay with AOP records. To us, it's better this way, we'd rather stay than sign to a much bigger label and be just a number there. I mean, Sven from AOP and I are very much like best friends nowadays. We phone each other every week or so, we talk about everything.

That's a very cool way to work, we feel at home on a label like this. We're not just working buddies, we're really friends and we know that he would do everything for us. He's the kind of guy who would go to the bank and ask for a loan of 50 000 euros so he could pay for studio with all the production costs, if needed. He would do whatever it takes. If you know someone like that, you stay with their label.

Absolutely. Since you are the band's lyricist, I'd like to ask about the lyrics. Are they also going to be personal on the new album?

Yes, that's because I don't know how to write about something that is not autobiographic. I'm just not able to write lyrics that are not personal. So as long as the Harakiri story continues, it will stay like this.

Sometimes it's pretty easy, but sometimes it gets quite difficult and it can take me some time to find the right words for everything. I'm not working with a mindset where I tell myself to finish everything by a very precise date. That's because I'm writing all the time. I always have a pen and a small notebook with me where I write down my ideas down and such. So when it comes to recording a new album, I just have to sort my ideas, for example sort them by topics and themes, and this is how I work, basically.

It shows your dedication to the lyrics, I think. By the way, have you ever considered writing texts in German or do you leave it for other projects instead, like Karg?

It was something we discussed in the very beginning of the band. Generally, me and Matthias are not big fans of mixing up languages. Well, we did it once on the album **Aokigahara** because there was a band from Germany in question, by now it has already split-up. They didn't want to sing in English, their vocalist wanted to sing in German. Since he wanted to go for it and at the same time, we really wanted him on the feature, we made a compromise to make this feature in German, but I'm personally not a fan of such combinations.

I just think it's better to choose your language - write in German or write in English, or any other language you are able to speak. For Harakiri, it's English. We're a band with English-themed lyrics, so to speak. I'm a lucky guy to have the opportunity to separate this and work in these two bands.

For example it's totally clear that Karg has always been in a dialect, in the German dialect in which I speak, so naturally, Harakiri would be in English. That sounds pretty cool when I can sort out ideas and themes directly just by choosing the language.

I think it's also helpful when you work with other artists. Recently, you worked with Neige and the previous singer from Gaerea...

That's a very good point because everybody speaks English these days. Nearly everyone can communicate well and contribute to the stuff we are writing. That's also a problem I have with Karg nowadays – there are simply not that many musicians other than those with whom I have worked on with previous albums. I'm searching for a female vocalist who can scream or growl and who also speaks my dialect, which seems nearly impossible!

There's not as many musicians as in the English-speaking scene, like for Harakiri for the Sky. It's never a problem there, you can choose musicians based on what you like about them and their voice, you're not limited just because they speak a certain language. English makes it far easier.

That's for sure. Can we also expect some guest vocals on the newest album?

Yes, but there's not much I can share just now. We are still working on some of those guest vocals. You know, artists are not always easy to work with, sometimes just because they don't answer the e-mails regularly (laughter). So we are still waiting for some features for the recorded tracks, that's why I can't say anything more before it's really, properly finished.

There will be at least two or three features, that's for sure. Two of these are already finished, we have them in the final mix. These will work out great, I think. But, as for now, people will have to wait a little bit more.

It will surely be worth the wait.

Well, I hope so... there's always this time for promotion when you just shouldn't talk about it too much before! (laughter) Only then, the album is out so in this case, I think you have to do it the way everybody else does.

Yes, exactly. When it comes to working with music, do you guys in Harakiri for the Sky also have day jobs or do you work with music full-time?

I work as a freelancer in the music field, I'm also writing for a magazine which is called SLAM Alternative Music Magazine. In the magazine, we cover all kinds of music – and I don't mean just heavy music by that. I'd actually say guitar music, from indie rock to black metal.

It was difficult during the Covid pandemic and when we couldn't play live in the lockdowns, but other than that, it's okay.

We talked about playing live, but we also talked about recording. Do you prefer the recording part or the live part with playing concerts?

The part which I like the least is recording. I really like to write songs and lyrics, and to work on all this stuff, but I really don't like being in the studio. I don't know! (laughter)

I've never enjoyed the atmosphere when you have to function on point. Even if you have a really bad day or when your voice doesn't work as it should for all the vocals, you have to be on point. It might not work out the way you wanted, so you still have to sing it and try. That's because you have the studio time for certain set dates and all that.

So I always feel pressure when working in the studio, which I don't feel when it comes to the creative part or playing live. For me, the best feeling when it comes to making music is definitely the creative part and then, playing live when you already have the songs ready. It's almost like you have them in your brain and in your body's nervous system, so to speak – after you've played them around ten-fifteen times live, then you know you don't need to think about anything anymore. It just comes off naturally. When I can focus on singing on the show, that's the best part, I'd say.

Studio work really sounds like putting a lot of pressure on yourself.

Yes, although it's also a different thing when it comes to playing guitar for example. In that case, everything should work out fine as long as you get a few hours of sleep and you're not showing up drunk in the studio. But for the vocals, and it's a logical thing, you sometimes have a better voice, sometimes worse, and you can't really influence it all the time. Basically... if your vocals are fucked, then they are fucked! You can't do anything about it, that's the thing. And that makes the pressure bigger. When you have to go to the studio, that's the main pressure you have, and this is something that differs the singer from the instrumentalist – hope that makes sense!

It does! Since we were talking about playing live shows and mentioned the Polish which is happening soon, I was wondering if you see the difference between the crowd's energy in Austria or Germany and in Poland or generally Eastern Europe?

I don't think there is that much of a difference, really. Eastern Europeans are maybe a little bit more down to earth, but it's nearly the same kind of people that you have in Austria, Germany... the countries are not so far from each other, after all. If you've ever been to South America or for example Mexico, where the audience is just crazy... they totally freak out! Everything seems quiet and down to earth compared to countries like this. But yeah, of course I've always liked the Polish audience and generally the country. Our bassist was even born in Poland, in one of the four cities we're playing in, and that's where he grew up before his family came to Austria. So we have this Polish connection.

It's really great! We are really looking forward to that. I hope I can end up on a philosophical note, because it's really interesting to me how in one interview, you said something along the lines of "art is freedom". I was wondering if Harakiri for the Sky is a project that gives you this kind of artistic freedom? Do you have this artistic freedom of expressing yourself and doing what's important to you?

Sure! What I mean is that everybody knows their own part. I can do whatever I want, I can write about what I want, so it's always something personal. Matthias works more with the music he wants to record and express himself in, and it somehow fits together. It's nearly never something we disagree on or need to change. That's it, it happens maybe two times per album, and also when it comes to the rest, everybody is free to express themselves as they wish to. We have found the way in which everybody is doing it and enjoys it the most. That's totally how it is.

Sure, this is what matters. Well, thank you so much for the conversation. I won't take you much more time now... have a good day and see you in Poznań!

Thank you for the interview.