

At the beginning of June 2024, a three-day Sátan festival took place in the picturesque town of Stykkishólmur, hidden in an Icelandic fjord. It was the first edition, but the lineup, professional organization, side events and a cheerful and trusting atmosphere during the event resulted in the first batch of big names confirmed for the next edition, and an avalanche of extremely positive comments from the participants – mainly Icelanders, going crazy during the concerts. One of the bands playing this year was Misþyrming, definitely black metal elite. A few hours before their concert, I sat down in the hotel lobby with **Dagur Gíslason**, the vocalist, guitarist and mastermind of the band, also a music producer, and we had an almost hour-long conversation with chillout music playing in the background. Chillout must have hit hard enough that the conversation turned out to be very pleasant, and Dagur was relaxed the whole time. Often, instead of "yes", he was saying "já" in Icelandic, which I decided to leave in the transcription. Don't expect philosophical revelations. It was a light conversation about music, the band, concerts, and my interlocutor. And about silence. (*Marta Szczepanik, kvlt.pl*)

M.S. First of all can you please tell me what does Misþyrming mean? Because the translator says it's 'mistreating' or something like that, but maybe Icelanders know a hidden meaning behind it?

D.G. Yes, it's a two-part word and it basically means 'abuse'. 'Mis' is just like in English: mis – doing something wrong, and 'þyrming' means 'mercy'. So it's not exactly 'no mercy', but the opposite of showing mercy, it's like willingly not showing mercy. Just totally fucking someone up.

OK... Something like not 'being bad', but just an 'evil'?

Hm... No, it's very physical, it's a violent word.

Violent word for violent behavior.

Yes. The name came after I wrote a few songs. I knew that these songs are very evil, they demand that the band has a similarly heavy name.

Black metal should be like that, right?

Yes!

Evil, dark, not for everyone...

I don't think we should compromise the evilness. It should be at the max.

Like in your music. But in the same time each of your three albums is a step forward, there are some differences between each of them. For me personally it's fascinating what else can we do in music, but there are people that don't like changes and they will be always complaining that they in example preferred *Söngvar* *elds og óreiðu*'s chaos or *Algleymi*'s melodies. So where for you is the borderline - if it is – between what you need to create and what is to be released by the Mysþyrming's logo?

Well... Let's say it in these words. The song *Hof* that we did for a split with Sinnmara was not supposed to be a Mysþyrming song. It's a lot more death metal than what I was writing at the same time. I wrote it around the same time as the first album. And I thought: yeah, this should be for a death metal band, it's not black metal enough to be Misþyrming. And then I was thinking about it for some time, and eventually I realized it's a really evil song, so it fits the band, but it would just be something different. Sometimes I'm in the mood to do something melodic, sometimes I'm not, and sometimes I want to do something very chaotic and sometimes I want to do something very straightforward. So I

really appreciate variety and I also understand when people are disappointed with something new, because they already have high expectations from what they already know. I myself also have this experience, as a fan of other bands, when something new is released and I'm like: ah, it's not as good as the stuff that I love from this band. And also sometimes things just take a bit of time to get use to them, so I'm also very happy when people tell me that they didn't like my album until the third listening, because, you know, it takes time to grow, so it means there is some foundation when the things need to grow like that. That's like when an instant hit or something that people like right away usually doesn't last as long, I think. Which goes with pop music, for instance.

It's probably like with people, when you don't like someone from the first sight and you have to get to know them, than the relationship probably gets stronger?

Yeah, exactly.

The lyrics also differ between the albums. Like *Algleymi* was more insight and *Með hamri* is way more warlike. You probably didn't have any concept for that and just had such feelings during writing, but do you consider yourself a warrior?

(*laughter*) Well, that's a... hard question. Well... when it comes to the shows, the actual performance, also performing in the studio – the execution is very warlike, I think. It needs to be pushed to the absolute extreme and I'm not sure if there's a lot of difference when you're for instance in the studio recording guitars, you have your amplifier, you put some medium volume – it sounds good and you can record it. When we were recording *Með hamri* we turned amps as loud as we could, even though the microphone would display it not much differently later on, but just knowing that everything's on ten and playing it that way really brings out the intensity. That's basically what I mean with the attitude, you know – kill'em all. No compromise, just full force.

Já, and music is – I don't wanna sound like a snob or something – but I think music is a very tasteful way to express emotions without words. So the music or Misþyrming is basically the extension of how I'm feeling, like sort of open diary and I always write lyrics afterwards, so the music comes first and then I listen to the music and I see what's the feeling in this song and what's the point. The lyrics is basically when I'm asking myself what's happening in the song, what should I sing about with these melodies.

Quite understandable for me, because I think the music has even more power than the word. They say: the word has a great power. But the music was with us much earlier than words.

And everybody understands it, without words, it's an international language.

Yes! When you see the crowd understanding your music, like in the trans, do you have a feeling of a power over us?

No. We're doing this together. I'm not standing on the stage in front of an empty house. It's a collaborative effort. The crowd gives us energy and we give energy back. It's a conversation. And of course we are leading it and we are in control, but that's not a point.

So is the concert some kind of a mystical act between the artist and people?

Yes! It's a cult ritual (*laughter*). It's underground, a niche, and people that know it and enjoy it they – and myself included – we really appreciate this culture that we have, the black metal world.

Do you write music when you're pissed off?

I write lyrics when I'm pissed off. I only write music, when I feel energetic. I don't think it's based on if I'm happy or pissed off, I'm energetic when I wanna do something.

And what do you do when some awesome riff comes to you when you're, I don't know, in the pub or in the car in the middle of nowhere?

Sometimes I'm literally just whistle it on my voice recorder. Of course the best thing is to go home, pick up the guitar and nailed it down with a voice recorder, so I don't forget it – because I will forget it. So yeah, songs start like that or I'm just sitting with the guitar and playing around. I record a lot of ideas, sometimes I realize that I have many ideas that fit to each other and start putting together a song.

And how is it with instrumental interludes and end tracks, like outros? I really like them. I'm talking actually about the first album and *Sól án Varma* too, because on *Með hamri* it wasn't you that composed them, right?

Yes, I wrote one. The one before *Engin miskunn*, in the end of *Með harmi*. That was supposed to be just martial – warlike – sounds. So... the one after the first song and after *Engin miskunn* is by my friend, Kristófer, who used to be in a black metal band from Akureyri. It was a fantastic band. He kind of went out of the black metal thing and started to going deep into a strange, dark electronic music. And he's all about analogs, synthesizers and he has a project called Aska and it's fantastic and extremely bitter, it's sort of a darkest stuff I know. We've been good friends for a long time. He wrote some lyrics on first two albums – for one song on each of them. For *Með hamri* I didn't need any lyrics, but I still wanted him to be a secret fifth member and do something on the album, so I asked him: would you like to make a short spooky interlude, maybe two of them? And he's: no problem! And he sent it over to me and asked that I can edit it, I can change, and I was like: you made it, I want you to choose how it sounds. He did a great job, I'm very happy to have him on board. He's also a very good poet, he's written a lot of poetry, and I'm just a very big fan of him.

Great, I'm gonna check that out! Will you go back to writing the interludes on the new album?

What new album? *(laughter)*

I hope for some!

Já. Yes. And... even I will try to see if I can mix it together with the music. I was doing these experiments with *Engin miskunn* and in the end of *Engin vorkunn*, like there's a lot of symphonic stuff happening in the background.

Yeah, especially in *Engin vorkunn*.

Yeah. I really like horns and of course choirs, I've always been a big fan of choirs on all the albums. And I'm very happy that I have the opportunities with my studio gear to actually create something like this, and when the skill is growing I'm more confident with all that's in front of me to make some interludes, and stuff like this happen. So, yeah, I don't know, maybe I will want to do something industrial or something like that! I think the band is over when I stop experiment. I think that it should be like always trying to push and see what strange places we can go that we haven't been before.

Yeah, that's fascinating, really. Because I was going to ask you if you maybe in the future would like to go back to the experiments or a variety of instruments (bass, keys) or styles – like you played in the bands like Drottinn or Núll, that are more death or even doom metal – and the

vocals: even on the first Misþyrming album I think you used the widest range of vocals. But I see the answer is: yes.

Yeah! I was doing the vocals on the first album for the first time ever. So I was very experimental. Yeah, I was totally naive. But I knew what I wanted to do, so I'm happy with an outcome.

They were insane. Do you listen to the music as various as you create yourself – brutal, fast, metal – and dreamy, soft, like for the ambient interludes?

Sure, that's just the wide range of emotions, like it is in a human body. Sometimes we're in the mood for some fast music and sometimes for something more relaxing or something in between. And I'm always listening. I'm just an avid music fan.

OK, then how do you perceive the silence? Do you really still have to listen to something, or is it natural for you?

Sometimes I take a walk and I don't take my headphones, just take a walk. I think Paul McCartney said that it's ridiculous that people have their headphones – when you go outside it's just listen to the birds, the city and everything.

Absolutely.

My favorite place in the world is a swimming pool that we have in Reykjavík. I go there three times a week or so, even more. And it's a place where there is no music and there is no phones, and of course it's very nice to relax in the water. It's really nice to sit in a hot tub with a lot of strangers – when I go so often I have some familiar faces and, you know, just nod to them – and nobody's on the phone. And there is no distractions, and you can be alone with your thoughts. Some people don't like to be alone with their thoughts, but I think it's very healthy to do nothing sometimes.

Does it clear your mind or emotions?

(nods)

It's needed and should be natural for us.

Yeah, this phone world that we're living in is just scary. Everybody's on the phone, all the time, always checking out, checking the news, what's happening. Very aggressive.

Now it's social media that is the new religion for some...

Yeah, and people consider it a hobby. Going on Instagram, that's how I like to spend my time too, sometimes... Yeah, it's terrible, extremely addictive.

Well, I refused to have an account on Instagram. I prefer to read a book, train, listen to the music, go to a concert. I saw you twice last year. At Brutal Assault and in the club in Warsaw. And I wasn't the only one who had the feeling that the festival one let your music to be more powerful, more beautiful and I think maybe Mysþyrming's music needs some space or natural surroundings, like rain, wind, open sky, it's like at the shows of Wardruna...

Yeah.

You need to stand, see fires and stars. So how do you feel it? I know you prefer to be close to the crowd.

Well, the club in Warsaw was a bit too small and the stage was in the corner and it wasn't our dream venue. But all I've heard was that there were only small venues like this and really big in Warsaw, so there was no middle size for us... But having the people close is very personal, for sure. And I think you were lucky – the Brutal Assault show was possibly our best show ever.

Really?

I was ecstatic after that, I thought it was so good. Extremely late...

Yes!

It was hard to wait so long – for us and hard for many of the fans, I just remember many people complaining to me: you play too late, I'll be too drunk or too tired. But then at 2am, when the show started, everybody was happy...

Was there.

Yeah, was there – awake! (*laughter*) It was a fantastic show.

I was ecstatic too, because it was my first Misþyrming show and after it ended I was like: what the fuck was that? It was outstanding.

I'm happy to hear that.

But the atmosphere was great too, the rain, cold.

Yeah. And the stage was pretty too. Big. I like to play at bigger stages.

OK, so big stages and not the smallest clubs.

Well, I like both. Like I have seen Marduk in a very small club and I've seen them on a very big stage. Both are great, but it's different. Like we're saying: smaller ones are more personal. But the bigger ones are more grandiose, more epic. There are pluses and minuses.

And Misþyrming's music is epic.

Yeah. At least it means to be big (*laughter*).

You had a big stage and big lineup with Sól án Varma at Roadburn. How it was to play in such a huge lineup with actually your idols, if I can say that about Svartidauði?

That was a different kind of experience. This was before Drottinn... Yes, we didn't start Drottinn until after this. Yeah, well, we were already really good friends, so it's not being a fanboy anymore (*laughter*). It was cool to do something similar to what we've been doing in Misþyrming, but making out a new lineup with different members – many members, like we have been in seven – each and everyone in this group had their own specialty, the character when it comes to writing music. Yeah, I think it was a very cool experiment that came out as good as it could have been. The concept that we made, all the lyrics and ideas that we're throwing around and just being under the pressure to make a show of 70 minutes with exclusive music. And we had to do it in nine months! We waited five

months and then realized: oh, we kinda have to start doing this, and the last four months were really stressful. Yeah, it's a mix of Misbyrming and Svartidauði and a bit of Carpe Noctem, and I'm happy that this thing came out. And the show itself at Roadburn was also very strange. You know, doing this one-time thing, exclusively, on a big stage, in a very professional venue, like all the equipment on stage was very expensive and the venue was very fancy. It was strange.

When was it?

We did it in 2018. And the idea started in 2017.

Did you already know then that you wanna record it as the album?

Yes... Yeah.

Luckily. Because it's absolutely fucking great.

Thank you! It was a hard thing to record. There's so much happening.

Yes. It's so cathartic, you just need to listen to it from the beginning to the end, completely focused on that. I made that mistake and just started with *Afbrigði VII*...

Yeah, the promotional one, we released it before the whole album.

Yes, Nergal posted it on his facebook and that's the way I found it.

He's a big fan (*laughter*).

It definitely looked like that. But then I've got the album and from the beginning to the end it's like a story...

Mhmm.

***Afbrigði VII* is my favorite track on the album. You wrote that, right?**

(*nods*) Could be Misbyrming song (*laughter*).

Yes! It's so epic and dramatic.

We played it a few times.

Will you do that in the future, maybe today?

Ah, not today, no. It's a different tuning, so it's not a big problem for us to change the tuning, but we prefer not to. Especially outside Iceland, because it's always better to have another guitar than to change the tuning. We played it, I don't know, maybe four-five times since the album was released. It always feels great. It's a very hard song to play. I fuck up my parts of it sometimes. Well, we'll definitely play it again, I think. Not yet, but some time in the future.

Another big name you cooperated with. How was it to tour with Mgla?

It was great! It was our first tour ever and it was the same time when they released *Exercises in futility*. They were becoming very successful and more and more famous, very fast. It was six days,

we weren't on the same bus as they were, it was like three different bands and the whole group was split in two. We were on a bus throughout the tour with One Tail, One Head and Dávid Glomba, the artist who did a poster for a tour and he's been helping out on tour. We were listening to Guns N' Roses whole time, cause that's what OTOH guys and Dávid wanted to listen to. He even had a bandana like Axl Rose (*laughter*). I didn't really get to know the Mgła guys a lot at that time, but we were hanging out at the backstages. They are very professional. Maciej starts warming up for his drums three hours before the show and he just sits with drumsticks, playing a little pad thing for three hours.

Do you listen to their music?

Yeah! I've been also the fan of Kriegsmaschine. And a last show of the tour was in Kraków. It was a biggest show and it was grand, like a very nice venue and it was a good way to end the tour in their home town, I think, especially when they were organizing it.

It was the one where you recorded the video for *Söngur heiftar*, right?

Yes.

Do you know any other Polish black metal bands?

Yes, there are some, for example Cultes des Ghoules, I'm a big fan of them.

And you were at Fortress Festival a week ago and played in a lineup with Furia – they're quite cult band in Poland.

Yes, I know them too. And they have many side projects, they're very active. Yeah, but Cultes des Ghoules is probably my favorite.

OK. Isn't it too early to ask you about a new album?

Yes, it's too early. But I promise you the next thing you're gonna hear from us is gonna be different.

Ah, so this industrial?

No (*laughter*). Not the next thing. The next thing will be different in a very good way.

But still black metal.

We will see (*laughter*).

I can't wait! You as the band actually have a 10th anniversary this year - congratulations!

Thank you.

How the band's development affected you? These 10 years happened in your 20's, if I'm not wrong, when the person actually evolves, gets to know himself...

Já... Travelling a lot is... interesting. And meeting a lot of people from this culture is also interesting, you hear different opinion about this or that and you can see the world through their eyes. Yeah, there's a lot of experience in this. But of course it's still a small part of a society, that metal world.

And there's a lot of drinking (*laughter*). The drinking seems to be very tightly knit to this culture. I don't complain, but sometimes we come home very hangover from the trips and then at home it's just normal life.

Who would you be, if not a musician? Do you have any other special skills, predispositions?

Oh, I can't imagine that. I'm very happy that I am doing this, and even if I wasn't a musician myself I'm pretty sure that I would be a metalhead and I would be going at the festivals, it would definitely be my number one hobby!

Well, it's a luck to be who you want to be and who you love to be.

Yes, definitely.

OK, so do you wanna talk about any other stuff or say anything to the fans?

I want to come back to Poland. I really like to play in Poland.

Great to hear that.

We played in Poland in January last year, one and a half year ago, in Kraków. And it was on Monday and there was three hundred people going crazy. On Monday. I was very thankful for the Polish fans.

Polish fans love Misþyrming, really. And our reviewers often say that you are – not even one of the best – just the best black metal band nowadays. I can agree with that.

Well... that's a big words. How can I be anything other than very happy to hear that? But I... don't agree (*laughter*) That's also because I have so many favorite bands. But of course I'm believing in what I'm doing and I'm doing my best, we're doing our best, all of us in a band, so if people are accepting our contribution – with big words like these – then I'm very thankful that a hard work is paying on.

That's what counts the most and that's also why we think that. Thank you so much for your time for this conversation!

Yes, thank you! You have a lot to transcript!

<https://kvlt.pl/muzyka/wywiady/misthyming-zadnych-kompromisow-cala-naprzod>