

VAFURLOGI: I CONSIDERED RELEASING IT ANONYMOUSLY

Þórir Garðarsson is one of the pillars of the Icelandic black metal scene. The guitarist and one of the main songwriters in the leading bands there: Svartíðauði and Sinmara, almost since the beginning, as well as touring guitarist for Almyrkvi and Rebirth of Nefast, now is embarking on a new (but only partially) chapter in his career. Vafurlogi is his own project, which released the debut album *Í vökulli áþján* last year on Norma Evangelium Diaboli and Oration Records. Behind this mysterious title, which we both try to figure out in our conversation, musically there's Icelandic black metal's characteristic combination of brutality with raw beauty and space, and lyrically there are some gnostic elements... I spoke with Þórir, a charming, humble and warm man, about 'wandering light', search for truth, being a role model and about the creative freedom, in Reykjavík, a few days before Christmas and just after the end of the 2024 edition of Iceland's oldest metal festival, Andkristni (nomen omen, Anti-Christian). You are invited! PS, because there are always questions about how to read Þ/p – as th in think.

Interviewed by: Marta Szczepanik

Let's start with the name of the band. As I know, in Nordic mythology Vafurlogi can mean 'the flickering light' and it can be good or bad, which often depends on how you treat it. It can lead you to your house or the treasure or show you the wrong way generally. Did you have this meaning on your mind while choosing the band's name?

Yeah! I think for me that's one of the meanings that kind of speak to me for this name. Because the word in Icelandic is a little bit hard to translate directly. And in Icelandic it's quite multifaceted and has this poetic sensibility to it that I like. So as you said it can mean 'flickering flame' of course, yes, and another kind of a meaning that's present in there is the theme of travel or to wander. So in a way you can also translate it as 'wandering light'. And these themes are quite central to what I'm trying to say in a lot of the works of this project. So very important to me are the themes of search, search for a higher meaning, for a higher realm, so to say. Of course throughout human civilisation the light has represented the search for meaning, the truth, and that which is beautiful and sublime.

And actually the themes of the band are also quite inspired by teachings and worldviews of gnosticism. In those scriptures there's this ever present search for the divinity which is always out of reach, but which still imbues a small spark of the divine light in those who seek to kindle this part of their soul, so to say. The search for this illumination and transcendence or reaching a higher spiritual plane to me is something that I can connect with on a deep level. So these elements of it inspire me quite a lot, but also because it has this kind of frailty to it also, fragility and weakness.

Were you always close to this or did you just search for what could be the proper name for the band?

Well, you've mentioned the Norse mythology, but I would say that themes of this band are not necessarily drawn from it. Although the lyrics in Sinmara they are quite heavily influenced by Nordic mythology and folklore, Vafurlogi is quite different and these themes from gnosticism kind of grew naturally to be a central theme in this band, but this project isn't bound to a single concept, you know. These are overarching themes, which I think are able to be branched out in a different ways, and I don't want to fetter my creativity with just a single box, shall we say. But these concepts are something that I've been inspired by for many years. This project is quite old and some of the songs are written many, many years ago and I would say that as the core musical structure of the band kind of grew with the years, then this thematic element grew in parallel and they're tied beautifully together.

So can you say about yourself that you're a gnostic or you're just interested in some elements of it, which fit to the music?

I don't subscribe to any organised doctrine, in fact I'd actually consider myself an atheist. I also prefer to live my life outside of any religious organization or cults. I'm simply inspired by parts of the Gnostic worldview, and I feel it encapsulates certain feelings and themes which I connect with deeply, such as those of spiritual isolation, alienation, disillusionment and the search for elusive higher truth... which I actually think mirrors the creative process in a way.

So how it has been with this process in case of your debut album *Í vökulli áþján*? I was surprised when I've read that the songs were written quite some time ago. It was before 2018, right?

Yeah, and if I may go closer in time first – we have recorded two albums between December 2020 and December 2024. The drums for both albums were actually recorded in one day in early December 2020. *Í vökulli áþján* actually consists mostly of the newer songs of the project, which were written between 2018 and 2020. That was quite a creative period in my songwriting – you could call it a manic burst of inspiration. Some of them were actually sourced from riffs and ideas which I had lying around from my other projects. Not being able to be used in those, I was able to weave them together with newer ideas and create something that I think has its own core identity. I'm quite proud of this first album. The second one represents these oldest, foundational, songs of the band, some of them were written as far back as 2007, when I was obviously just young... as a person – and as a songwriter also (laugh) – taking some of my first steps in music...

And this new album is on its way, am I right?

Yes, hopefully it will be released in 2025, it's in the final production stages.

Frábært! Great!

Já! It's a little bit out of my hands in the moment, so I can't promise any dates, but 2025 is quite realistic. So that's exciting.

Certainly. Can we talk about the music a little bit more? The album is full of various ways of expression and also it connects traditional and modern approach to black metal – as you said. We have here beautiful, catchy melodies (with my favorite in *Duftið eitt*), galloping riffs and brutality, epicness and majesty. Is it also the musical interpretation of the word Vafurlogi? The flickering flame is running away, or guiding, like the melodies, music here, quite elusive, not really touchable. Like if you were looking for your way in the music.

Thank you for these kind words. I think you've captured a lot of what I was aiming at doing with the album, so glad to hear that. I would say that both consciously and unconsciously the name reflects a lot of the emotions, you know, and moods and atmospheres that I've tried to capture with this project in particular. Because e.g. in case of Svartidaudi the themes are very dark, deep, apocalyptic, nightmarish realm, and have this sort of extremely malicious energy to it. And in Sinmara we're working with a lot of dark folklore of our culture, which inspires us, the Norse mythology and destructive aspects of it.

And for Vafurlogi I would say the name represents a lot of the dualities of the music. As you said, it's dark and haunting at times, but it also has this glimmer of light... at the end of the tunnel, shall we say. The light or fire in the name also has this duality: illumination and destruction. And of course there's also this elusive nature of that which you're searching for in this, shall we say, cursed pilgrimage. You've also mentioned one element – the devious and elusive nature of the light, that can guide you on the wrong path, and this sort of complexity is also present in our music. I think much of this has come together naturally. The band's identity, both conceptually and musically, has cultivated for a number of years and although it's a young project on the surface, it's been a part of myself for a very long time.

It's like your another child.

Yeah! (laugh)

You've mentioned Svartidaudi and Sinmara and I have to admit that I wasn't as mesmerised by Vafurlogi album as I am now, after few another careful listenings. It's probably because I was expecting something, knowing those two other bands – such a human flaw, when sometimes you are not open to something new. I mention that because after the release of *Í vökulli áþján* all the reviews immediately focused on how much Vafurlogi mixes Svartidaudi with Sinmara. Were you even interested in such analyses, did you read them?

As a listener myself, I totally understand the feeling of comparing the artist's work with his past works and that's also something I've been guilty of myself, but I think it's unavoidable

with music that you like or are interested in. As an example it took me a while to accept Dissection's last album, *Reinkaos*, because I was comparing it to *Storm of the Light Bane*, which I know a lot of people were dealing with at the time. And as I listened to it more carefully, it really grasped me as its own work and, you know, now it's one of my favorite albums ever, so I know that feeling. It's completely valid.

And it's actually natural for us, because our brains like similarities and look for what we already know, so we automatically see it.

Yes, exactly. It's totally understandable. Also when venturing out with a new project you can't just cut all the strings to your other projects and body of work, and when I was deciding how to portray or present this band at the start, a part of me just wanted to release it anonymously, with no information about the members.

Let it stand on its own instead of being compared to my other projects, which yes – can be an unfair comparison. But actually, I would say, given the stamp that it had at the start, of an ex-Svartidaudi project I was pleasantly surprised by the reviews and feedback that I've had, because for me it's dramatically different from what Svartidaudi was doing on most of our albums. So I am quite happy that it's been accepted in a kind of rational, fair way as its own work, accepted for what it is. I'm happy about that.

Are you doing vocals for the first time for this album? I really like them, both your voice and techniques...

Thank you!

Were you doing vocals before?

No! This is my first attempt at doing vocals ever! And I'm quite old now, so I guess it's different from being a teenager starting out and being able to grasp new things more easily, so it's a bit of a challenge. Yeah, in the last few years I've been developing my style and technique for doing vocals. It's been a big challenge for me and something I'm glad I decided to do.



Well, in these echoed, syllabified words, sentences (I think in *Helgrindur* mostly) I hear some ancient spells. Did you expect this effect?

There are of course some magic grimoires and books of spells in Icelandic, which are very adaptable to a black metal environment, but that's not something that I do at this project at all, so it's more by accident (*laugh*).

Side effect.

Yeah, but of course Icelandic is a very ancient language. It's very similar to how it was spoken a thousand years ago. We have this element which is present in the other Scandinavian languages, but it has been more developed and modernized in them than it has been in our language, but I think the Icelandic language is quite interesting to be used in a black metal context.

Absolutely! My thoughts too.

(*laugh*) And in a musical sense it has these interesting rhythms and the feelings that the words can portray.

It's very melodic. Beautiful and powerful.

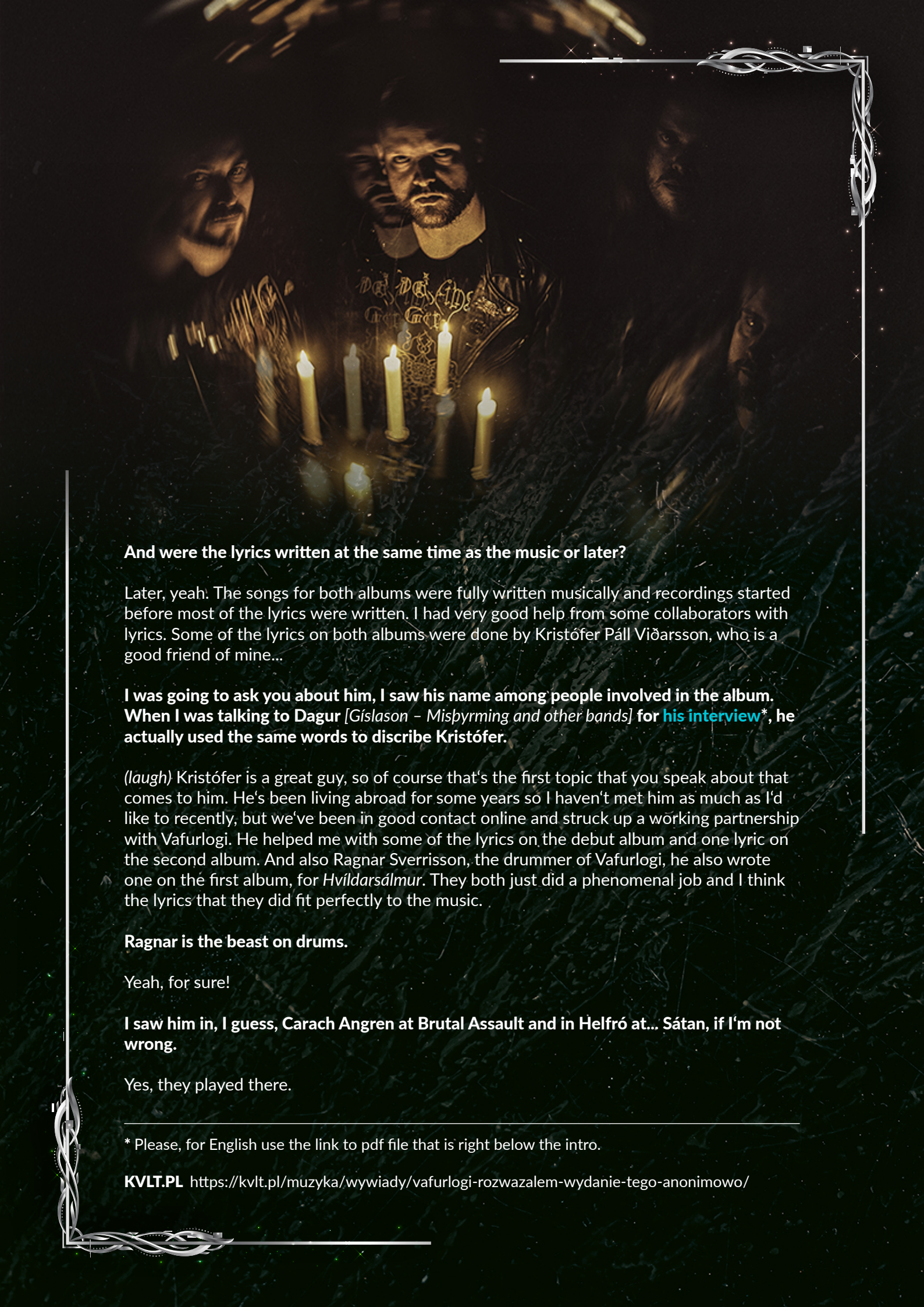
Yeah! And that's something that can very easily fit into black metal. So Icelandic felt very natural for me as a language for this band and up to this point every song is in Icelandic, except for one song on the second album, which is in English. It's also my way of doing vocal patterns. It's quite rhythmic, which I think is in the standards of black metal, like the old Nordic bands, Norwegian artists for instance, like you have Nocturno Culto and Satyr for instance, who have this rhythmic way of making patterns. Jon Nödtveidt of Dissection as well. And that's something that comes naturally to me, but of course I respect all styles as the artistic choice for each vocalist.

Dissection gets back in our conversation almost as often as the gnosticism. It's like obvious that they are one of your main inspirations. But... connecting both topics - I know now that you aren't interested in joining any Satanic/gnostic organisation. And how it is with writing a grimoire? Actually the album lyrics probably could be a kind of it...

Well, I'll leave it to others. Although at times inspired by religious themes and symbolism my lyrics are far from being any sort of manifesto, religious text or grimoire. But they do at times tell the stories of men driven to madness in their quest for salvation, so perhaps you could say some of the lyrics provide a glimpse into the perspective of a grimoire writer.

So, back to Icelandic itself, what does particularly *Í vökulli áþján* mean?

Hm, it's kinda hard to translate, I haven't been able to find a translation of it that I'm happy with. Vökull can mean... lucid, awake, being mindful of your environment. Áþján means torment or being in some sort of enslavement. That would be it, I can't really find a concise way of making it catchy in English (*laugh*). But it also goes into the topics of gnostic worldviews I was talking about and the idea that you are in some way enslaved in this mundane physical world and that the true realm exists outside of that. Existential suffering or ennui as well, these type of psychological and philosophical themes, that I'm portraying. The title has this symbolic element to it.



And were the lyrics written at the same time as the music or later?

Later, yeah. The songs for both albums were fully written musically and recordings started before most of the lyrics were written. I had very good help from some collaborators with lyrics. Some of the lyrics on both albums were done by Kristófer Páll Viðarsson, who is a good friend of mine...

I was going to ask you about him, I saw his name among people involved in the album. When I was talking to Dagur [Gíslason – Misþyrming and other bands] for [his interview](#)*, he actually used the same words to describe Kristófer.

(*laugh*) Kristófer is a great guy, so of course that's the first topic that you speak about that comes to him. He's been living abroad for some years so I haven't met him as much as I'd like to recently, but we've been in good contact online and struck up a working partnership with Vafurlogi. He helped me with some of the lyrics on the debut album and one lyric on the second album. And also Ragnar Sverrisson, the drummer of Vafurlogi, he also wrote one on the first album, for *Hvíldarsálmur*. They both just did a phenomenal job and I think the lyrics that they did fit perfectly to the music.

Ragnar is the beast on drums.

Yeah, for sure!

I saw him in, I guess, Carach Angren at Brutal Assault and in Helfró at... Sátan, if I'm not wrong.

Yes, they played there.

* Please, for English use the link to pdf file that is right below the intro.

KVLT.PL <https://kvlt.pl/muzyka/wywiady/vafurlogi-rozwazalem-wydanie-tego-anonimowo/>

Ah yes, right, they were quite shortly after the release of the second album [Tálgröf, review in Polish [here](#)] then – wonderful too!

That's a great band.

Did you know each other earlier?

Actually I've known Raggi for many, many years, almost 20 years by now. He actually was the drummer of Svartidauði for a short period in 2007 and played a couple of shows with us when we were a little bit in-between drummers from our first lineup that did *The Temple of Deformation* demo. Then we had a more stable lineup that we had for a most of our career, which had Magnús [Skúlason - now *Misþyrming* and other] on drums. So, yeah, everyone knows Raggi, he's so prolific and the most professional, dedicated guy that you can find over here. He always takes things all the way, and does things the right way. An example of how to do things. When I was starting this band out and wanted to get someone to drum for the album recordings...

He was a first thought?

Yeah, he was an obvious choice to make. Of course I've worked with other great drummers and all of them have their own characteristics and styles, but I wanted to have a different kind of footprint on the drums for this album to give Vafurlogi its own identity. It also helps it stand out from the other bands that I've been involved in. Yeah, Ragnar has been a great member of the band. He really drives me on, you know, pushes me creatively, just to do things the right way.

I was at his drum workshop at Sátan, he's a very humble guy.

Absolutely.

Svartidauði gets back in our conversation. For many bands that are big names now it was a huge inspiration. Did you all in the band feel this admiration in Svartidauði active years? How is it to be such a role model?

(gentle laugh) I think it would come naturally to any country where a certain movement has such scarcity at the start. There were very, very few black metal bands when we started out, so just to be active and start to collaborate with international bands and labels was noteworthy at the time. So it was quite natural for the state of the black metal scene over here at the time. I'm of course really honored to hear these words from some of the bands over here and elsewhere, which I'm a big fan of as well. The bands which have come up in just the years after we've started, because the ball started rolling pretty fast. After we released our first album a lot of people around us, who are also friends and collaborators of ours, also started getting their projects going.

Now it's great to see how active the black scene is over here for the last years. But also, a few years ago, some fresh blood came in into the black metal scene in Iceland, and now you can see how people are getting inspired by Svartidauði, after the fact. There are for instance the guys from Forsmán and Múr, which I got to know when they were quite young, in part because they were fans of Svartidauði and Sinmara. I was really honored that I can give some sort of inspiration there. I said it from the start that they're gonna

go on a much higher level than we ever did and I think they're pretty much already there. Múr for instance for me is like from a totally different planet than anything else that's been going on over here. For them the sky's the limit. Musical geniuses. Especially Kári, I believe he's the main creator of the band.

They were recently in Poland, I have to check them live.

They're amazing live!

You've been involved in a development of Svartidauði and Sinmara almost from the beginning, right? Did you do songwriting too?

I joined them quite early in their history. Svartidauði was originally more of a solo project of Sturla [Viðar], our vocalist and bass player and didn't release anything at that stage of the band. Then me and Egill, Hafþór and Gunnar joined the band and that's when we became Svartidauði.

By the way, great guest performance of Sturla with Bölzer yesterday.

Yeah, absolutely! Great to see him back on stage. Sinmara had started out as a band called Chao and released a demo. And when I joined them – they were looking for another guitarist – then we started writing the first Sinmara album and decided to find a different name that will be more suitable for where we wanted to go creatively. However for both bands I was one of the main songwriters for sure, and for Svartidauði a lot of music was written in a songwriting team of me and Magnús. But the other members also contributed many ideas. We had a really collaborative way of working. In Sinmara it was also always collaborative, most of the songwriting was done by me and Garðar, the other guitarist, and then we both always fleshed out the ideas as a band. Other members also contributed songs and riffs and ideas.



And part of why Vafurlogi came to be was that I kind of needed a vessel where I could have free reign to do what I wanted. Some of the songs that I had written were kinda the odd one out, or didn't really fit with the styles of the bands, which of course sometimes is just a matter of details and the details can be the most important as you know. It's a totally different way of working when you're the sole songwriter, as opposed to a partnership, and it totally has its pros and cons. So I'm happy that I have both avenues open to me as a creator.

New experiences.

Yeah. And Vafurlogi has grown into a band in the last year, I have gotten other members in and now we have a full lineup. I've compiled a top notch lineup and it was a really detailed, drawn out and careful process of choosing the members, and at the first rehearsal as a full band you could really see the level, the energy and the dedication.

Do you consider them – the live members – as the full band members for the future?

Yeah, absolutely! I think the contribution and dedication that Ragnar, Samúel [*Ásgeirsson, bass*] and Eysteinn [*Orri Sigurðsson, guitar*] have brought to the band just makes it impossible for me not to view them as full members. But what the future will bring creatively is yet to be seen. It's been important to me to have a way to express myself in this sort of sole songwriter environment. So that might be the future of Vafurlogi, creatively, or it might not. That remains to be seen.

How do you feel as the frontman? And also singing and playing the guitar at the same time?

That's something that you need to learn from scratch, because although you can know all the songs perfectly on guitar and can play them blindfolded, but then you need to kinda re-learn them when you're having to sing as well and it's a different kind of method of compartmentalizing each part of the performance. That's something I have gotten suitably adapt at, but... still learning (*laugh*). It's a technique that's challenging to learn. The role of being a frontman is also new to me and that's no less of a challenge. It's something that I'm glad to be able to experience and try out, because in a way it's easy to just be a guitar player, always be in the shadows, and now I have to be a little bit more expressive, yeah - both on stage and as we are here today (*laugh*). That's outside of my comfort zone, but it's always good to go out of your comfort zone.

Do you see Vafurlogi now as your main project or still side to Sinmara?

I think, you know, as you compared it to be one of my children, of course you can never choose between your children, so... (*laugh*) All of my projects are important to me in equal measure. I guess anyone doing any sort of creative work, as you are doing as well with your journalism, have different channels and they can be more or less active, sometime one project will take control and take focus, and then another one will do so later. I think it's just a natural part of having many avenues. Also each band has its own members and personalities and structures to it, and its own culture, so that's something which I hold dear.

So what are the plans for Vafurlogi? We know that the second album is on its way, but will we see you at more live shows? Tour with Sinmara maybe?

(*laugh*) I've actually done tours with double duties, with Svartidauði and Sinmara, and Sinmara and Almyrkvi. It's just super fun, so I have nothing against that! With Vafurlogi we played two shows so far and we have another one lined up, at Sátan [*and at Andkristni*], and we're more than ready to hit more stages. That's what we want to do: to be an active live band. We would really love to go and play shows outside of Iceland – Poland for instance (*communicative smile*), and elsewhere, play some shows and see some familiar faces on the road. Yeah, the second album is coming out in 2025 on Norma Evangelium Diaboli and Oracion Records and there's been some songwriting for future releases for Vafurlogi as well. So we're just starting out. The future is bright.

For the last question and to close the topic of the band's name: you've mentioned that Vafurlogi can mean 'wandering light'. So what are you looking for while wandering through your life – as an artist and as a human? What's most important for you?

Hm, for me my personal life and my creative life are two different elements of my being or my character. I have a beautiful family, which is the most important for me. Becoming a father has put the things in a new perspective for me in recent years. It has given me a new outlook on life and I think most parents know what I mean.

It's like this good light that shows you the way home.

(*laugh*) Of course, yeah! But you always have dual elements to your being and I can channel some of the darker side in my songwriting. What I get out of making and playing music is extremely important to me and not something that I take for granted, especially after Covid that allowed me also to see things in a different perspective and realize the gratitude and passion that I have for doing what I'm doing.

OK, great. Thank you so much for your time and a nice, interesting conversation!

Thank you too, I had fun!

