

## **Druzhina Interview for Hammerheart #5 zine May 2011**

**K.P – Katja Pabel (interviewer)**

**A.C - Alexey Cherniavskiy (drummer and vocalist of Druzhina)**

***K.P:** „Kosmonoetika“, your second album, was released three years after the formation of Druzhina. For a band that has only been around for a few years, this is an absolutely stunning release! You have a very original sound that cannot be compared to any other bands, and the songs are very well composed. I got the impression that you are well-experienced musicians. So, have the members of Druzhina been active in other bands before, or are you simply naturals?*

**A.C:** Firstly, thank you for your comments and interest in our project. All of the members of Druzhina have been involved in numerous projects throughout the last decade. These projects included recordings, live performances, and generally underground activities. Some of the names are: Endless Autumn, Tidens Vind, Eggs of Gomorrh and Supayniyux (present until this day), amongst others. Apart from this, Druzhina was created as a new spontaneous prospect of our musical advance, and due to a special connection between the three members, resulting from a fortunate jam session.

***K.P:** I was quite surprised to read that Charles-Guillaume Méla, who is responsible for the piano, synth and acoustic guitar in your band, is from France. How did you first get in touch with him? How does the "international teamwork" work out? I guess you do not often have the chance to meet and rehearse, do you?*

**A.C:** Having met Charles-Guillaume in early 2003, engaging in some musical activities, we established a solid framework permitting the involvement and creative influence of Pavel Ruban to form something, in our opinion extending the musical horizons. Concerning the "international teamwork", we usually meet one time a year, and we do all the work on the spot, including composition/recording. There are other occasions where we have reunions, but those aren't usually musically orientated. So to sum in up, there are not many rehearsals, same going for concert opportunities etc.

***K.P:** You do not only have a French band member, but you also recorded both of your albums in Denmark with a Danish studio bassist, and in the first days of the band some rehearsals took place in Switzerland. This gives Druzhina some kind of a cosmopolitan touch. How did all this happen and do you think this international background has an influence on the sound of Druzhina?*

**A.C:** Personally, I have been traveling for many years of my life, and having lived in Denmark allowed me to encounter Pavel. Several years after, moving to live in Switzerland, we have met with Charles-Guillaume, which obviously introduced changes in my musical perspective. Thereafter, the three came in contact together and you have mentioned, added a "cosmopolitan touch" to the interaction. Obviously, the fact that we come from different backgrounds and different musical influences results in something that people recognize as a, perhaps, original sound. For us, it is a mere fusion of our capabilities, spirit and mentality.

***K.P:** Many bands claim to be influenced by nature in some way. You composed and recorded "Kosmonoetika" in a small village in Denmark "in full isolation and harmony with nature" (so the booklet says). Sounds like a very intense experience. Can you tell me some more about the way you experienced nature there and how it effected your music? Did the isolation help you to concentrate fully on the creative process?*

**A.C:** It was an intense experience indeed! Surrounded by vast lands, farms, and the closest village at 2.5km! Every considerate person is influenced by nature in some way or another, regardless of the way the influence is perceived. In this particular case, the music where acoustic/psychedelic/classical parts are present, is undoubtedly executed in a deeply profound way, when been surrounded by wilderness, opposed to concrete walls and industrial pipes. We went out to explore some areas, and found some really neat landscapes with ancient barrows, where the nobles were buried during the Bronze Age. Coming back to the studio was great after, and many parts were composed spontaneously as a result of those activities.

***K.P:** Did the choice to record somewhere in the wilderness (instead of visiting a regular studio) also have negative aspects? For example, were there any technical limitations in the recording process?*

**A.C:** Recording in the wilderness far from civilization and lost within nature provides a lot of inspiration. This opportunity provided us with many ideas and energy that was transposed onto the Kosmonoetika album. Despite the fact that being able to create music together is an indeed positive concept, spending 3 weeks seeing the other members every day, all day long, we all agree, was a very challenging task. Concerning the technical challenge, we had to mobilize a large studio setup 450km away from Copenhagen to a village called Bjerget. A lot of preparations had to be made with the studio equipment to ensure that everything was in working condition when we arrived. The main issue with all of this was the distant transportation of all the gear, and large expenses for hiring a large van.

**K.P:** *Did you really compose most of the material in Denmark? Didn't it put you under pressure to go to Denmark with nothing (or not much) in your hands and knowing that you have to come up with enough material for the new album? Or did you already have some solid ideas when you went there?*

**A.C:** The recording of the first full-length "Echoes of Distant Battles", being our first studio experience together, everything was composed during the two weeks of our stay in Copenhagen, on the spot: experimenting with diverse composition/recording techniques, and ongoing modifications. One song though, "Accomplishment" had the drum/synth parts composed in Switzerland. For "Kosmonoetika" we rented a house in the wilderness, and spent around a month composing and finalizing our ideas for the second full-length. This proved to be more challenging due to everyone's different expectations due to a postponed feedback from the first studio session.

Most of the times we try to develop a concept and try to lay out the musical illustration in a 'bilina' russian folk style, which is very interesting for creation process and musical development.

**K.P:** *How long did you stay in Denmark to compose and record "Kosmonoetika"? Did you have a fixed schedule for the recording session? Or were you rather flexible with the possibility to stay longer if things got stuck?*

**A.C:** We stayed for around a month in total. We had a fixed schedule which we didn't quite follow due to various distractions. There was a time limit, therefore the main goal was to finish everything we had to finish in Denmark: drums, synth, and preferably vocals. We managed to have a rough copy of the full album very close to our departure date back to Switzerland, and also some unreleased material.

**K.P:** *How would you describe the creative process of composing new songs? Is it a rather spontaneous and intuitive process in which ideas simply "come to your mind" or do you work on the songs in a very conscious and concentrated way? Or is it a mixture of both components?*

**A.C:** It is very difficult to predict the ways that we adapt to compose our songs. Every song has its point in time, a reference if you wish. Some are spontaneous and therefore carry a very different nuance of intensity; some are predetermined in the sense of message/wholesome role in the album's conception/speeds, tones - while some can be inspired by a visit to a museum, or other locations. It is an ever-evolving mixture that never stays static, and demands concentration in either of its forms.

**K.P:** *I'm not familiar with your first album "Echoes of distant battles". Is it in the same vein as "Kosmonoetika"? Where do you see the differences between the two albums?*

**A.C:** The albums are very different: the approach was completely different; location was chosen with a deliberate idea. Recording techniques, equipment, methods were alternated in order to achieve a result that could be seen as an evolvement, differentiated soundscape from "Echoes..". The main difference for me is probably the concept and the lyrics, which in fact, I have spent way more time than on "Echoes". It follows a story of a shipwreck and a man stranded on an island, discovering himself differently, while going through different landscapes, and finally meeting his brother, whom he thought died in the wreck. So conceptually, "Kosmonoetika" carries a much more psychologically-sinister, darker and eerie character. For me "Echoes" is symbolizing a manifestation of summer, conquest and more straight-forward folk themes. Despite difficulties, associated with the process of creating "Kosmonoetika", we undoubtedly consider the album a natural evolvement of our musical interaction.

**K.P:** *In your lyrics you pick up ancient Russian tales, but (in my opinion) not as clumsily as many "pagan" metal bands who simply glorify the past in a very clichéd way. What is to you the fascinating thing about*

*these old tales? Are you looking for timeless aspects in myths and legends? Or do you rather see this as some kind of escapism which lets you forget about the worries of modern life?*

**A.C:** Obviously, stating that we are a "pagan" metal band does not signify that we are followers of pagan religions. We all enjoy the battle themes, historical facts and legends about unbeatable barbarian warriors conquering foreign kingdoms, and the beautiful women that come along with the story. The ambiance and the approach to different viewpoints were very different in the past, and that's why it probably limits the border of interest and fascination for us. I wouldn't tag our music as glorification or homage to the ancient ways, but rather a remembrance and an insisting comparison to the weakness of human spirit in modern times, and a reminder of how much more straightforward it was before. Ornament this with couple of blastbeats, and you've got Druzhina!

**K.P:** *Dealing with the history and the ancient tales of one's own people unfortunately often goes along with xenophobia and resentments. I guess, as you have worked together with many people from abroad in Druzhina, your attitude is probably more open-minded. What is your opinion about the narrow-minded right-wing thinking which is not uncommon in the black/pagan metal scene?*

**A.C:** In Druzhina we do not engage in any conceptualism that could be perceived as external to our musical creativity. We don't really care about the scene in general.

**K.P:** *Can you tell me some more about the lyrical concept of "Kosmonoetika"? What was created first: the music or the lyrics?*

**A.C:** The lyrics were written before, but were slightly modified and edited in order to fit the album in a more fluid matter. Each song is a chapter, with it's own landscape and storyline. The saga starts of with a shipwreck and one man who is trying to survive in the dark waters(1), and luckily finds himself ashore but faints immediately. Upon awakening he realizes that he is stranded on an island and tries to go through the woods(2) to explore. A struggle of personality versus nature. Reaching atop a cliff(3) he sees a field with army tents awaiting the dusk to go to battle. Weakened he falls asleep, to find the tents empty in the morning. A reminder of solitude, "a forgotten sad melody about our primordial values"(4) is the next chapter. It signifies the low-end morale of modern humanity. Fatigue, disease has spread and the man is not sure if he is asleep or in awe. Delirious state leads to further wandering around the island, but in a more psychedelic way, with abstract lyrics about sleep, apparitions with multi-angular costumes appearing from shadows, and the night landscapes(6). Being on the verge of death, from the wounds and exhaustion, the man is looking at the star constellations(8) and wondering how the universe works and how he ended up in this particular place in this moment. At this time another man appears, and he finds out that it was his brother, who had also survived the shipwreck. They both wonder about the universe, and the album slowly reaches its outro. There are no lyrics in the booklet, but instead a couple of lines for each page in order to introduce a fluid, yet psychedelic thread to the epos and to erect diverse questions in a listener. Hopefully those questions will change with every listen, and lead to an interesting outcome. We thought also of continuing this story in future releases. The words are, however, written on water.

**K.P:** *The name "Druzhina" also relates to Russian history. If I got things right, the druzhina were some kind of noble warriors. Why did you choose this name and what does it mean to you? Why do you feel related to the ancient druzhina?*

**A.C:** Druzhinniki is a definition coming from the 9th century, meaning the selection of the elite warriors, that would attend personal service of a chieftain or knjaz. They would have their own men and served freely. The reason we chose this was probably because this would be a reminder to make some bashing music and focus on battle themes and ancient stories, where people were conquered and plundered by the mighty Druzhina! Related to ancient Druzhina? Hmm, if you piss us off we will probably smash you like in old times!

**K.P:** *I really like the artwork of "Kosmonoetika" very much, and it goes along perfectly with the dark atmosphere of your music. How did you get in touch with Kristina Tandrup of Njordfoto? Did you simply use pictures that already existed or were parts of the artwork created especially for your album? How important is the visual design of your releases to you?*

**A.C:** We encountered on Kristina after recording the first album, through some friends. All artwork has

been created specifically for the albums, where Kristina had all the artistic freedom to do the visual artwork, inspired by the conceptual themes of the albums. It has always been interesting to reflect music through visual artwork, and in our case there are some hidden elements in the artwork that represent the music theme, where it is up to the listener himself to try and discover them.

**K.P:** *Do you have any ambitions to perform your music live?*

**A.C:** Sure, although at this time it seems a bit complicated, and we are yet to find out if there is a possibility to find a session drummer, or should I perform vocals and drums in unison for live. We have thought about a tour two years ago, but that was cancelled due to a delayed response from the organizers. I'm pretty sure that there will be concerts in the future.

**K.P:** *Where exactly in Russia do you live? In a town or in a rather rural area? Do you also have the possibility to draw inspiration from natural surroundings at the place where you live? Is nature for you a part of your daily life or is it rather a place where you can forget about everyday's routine?*

**A.C:** None of the members live in Russia at this particular moment. Pavel is residing in Copenhagen, DK at this moment. I live in Geneva, Switzerland, and Charles-Guillaume is in Geneva's countryside. There are many mountains and beautiful areas around here, so naturally it helps the inspiration. This probably goes without saying, but the inspiration can be summoned from different sources. Unfortunately the daily routine doesn't permit the outings in nature on regular basis, but surely in some situations an escape into the wilderness provides a relaxing backbone for potential aspirations.

**K.P:** *What can you tell me about the metal scene in your area? Do you have the possibility to visit some concerts or do you have to travel far to find an interesting gig? Are you in contact with other bands, or do you rather stick to yourselves?*

**A.C:** In this area the metal scene is not worth mentioning. People have forgot the old ways and focus on very basic new-wave sound, which we do not favor. However, sometimes, there are some interesting concerts that are not too far from where we live - we surely attend those. We are in contact with mainly 2-3 black metal bands, that share our perspectives and are good guys and great beer drinkers!

**K.P:** *Although Druzhina can be labelled as black metal you also have some rather untypical influences in your music. What are your personal musical preferences? Do you listen to a lot of black metal? And which other metal and non-metal styles do you like?*

**A.C:** I wouldn't consider Druzhina 'black metal', although there are some parts that resemble it. We all share different music influences going from rock to black metal, classical, experimental/ambient/industrial and death/thrash. Personally I listen mostly to black metal and oldschool black/thrash.

**K.P:** *On your homepage you posted a promo video for the song "without return". Well, it's actually "only" a composition of single pictures and photographs, but nonetheless it is very well done. Aren't you tempted to do a "real" video with moving pictures for your music? If yes, what should that video look like?*

**A.C:** We wanted to summon a vibrant aspect to our music, thus we added a slideshow in particularly slow motion in order to simulate the experience related to the actual consensus of the song. Sincerely we didn't search further than that, and if ever there would be another video, we would have to instantly capture the experience - the consequence that doesn't involve any professional tendencies. This process would respond to our mutual agreement opposed to an external source.

**K.P:** *I could imagine your music might also work very well as a soundtrack. Would the possibility to write music for a movie be tempting and interesting for you? If yes, what do you think, which kind of movie would be fitting?*

**A.C:** Extracts from our songs could correspond to alternative psychedelic cinematography, within which we reside in our subconsciousness. Numerous prospect influences were plundered from geniuses, namely, Andrey Tarkovsky. Theoretically speaking, the hypothesis of creating a soundtrack-orientated material would be based on the 'zone' in the movie "Stalker". This creates a parallel between the spiritual perception and the 'mirrored' essence of reality that establishes the connection between the soundscape and us. This

would be our Stalker.

**K.P:** *You already recorded material for your next release, an EP. Please tell me some more about it! How many songs will be on the EP, what will they sound like and is there already a title?*

**A.C:** We recorded the EP around 6 months ago in Copenhagen, in the same studio as "Echoes of Distant Battles". The process took a week to compose and record the material. This time there will be one long track with some parts, which are new to the Druzhina sound. As for constant change and evaluation of our music, it still stays in the vein of the other records, just with some surprises. For the moment there are some vague ideas about the title, but nothing concrete yet.

**K.P:** *How far have the works on the new EP proceeded: Is the music completely finished? And what about the artwork? When can we expect the release of the new material?*

**A.C:** Everything was done during the week in Copenhagen as I've mentioned before. The mixing process is soon to be finished, and then we will have to concentrate on the artwork and the finalizing stage of the record. Also at this particular moment we have decided to commence a search for a new label to release our material, because we haven't been in contact with the guys from SoundAge Prod. for couple of years now.

**K.P:** *Let's finish the interview with this outlook to the future of Druzhina. Thank you very much for your time, Alexey. If there's anything else you want to tell our readers in Germany, you now have the chance to do so.*

**A.C:** We have met around 2-3 weeks ago and have decided that a new full-length will be taking place in the near future. Some ideas have been formed and conceptions concretized. For the time being, everything will be looking the usual for Druzhina type of work, and only time will show what is hidden behind the horizon. Thank you for your interest in our music!