

AN INTERVIEW
WITH . . .

IGNITOR

Interview by
Timothy 'The Impaler' Schwader

Ignitor is a heavy metal band from Austin, Texas, formed by guitarist Stuart Laurence (in Agony Column he is called Batlord) in 2003. They've undergone a few lineup changes over the years, but have maintained the current crew in steady fashion for the past three years. In addition to Laurence, the band consists of Jason McMaster (vocals), Pat Doyle (drums), Brendon Bigalow (bass), and Beverly Barrington (guitar). McMaster is no stranger to Mass Movement – I interviewed him about his band Broken Teeth in MM 23 – and no stranger to metalheads around the globe. Let's do the list: Watchtower, Dangerous Toys, Broken Teeth, Evil United, Gahdzilla Motor Company... McMaster is a metal warrior through and through. Doyle was the drummer for the absolutely legendary hardcore band Offenders. Laurence, of course, helped create the entire concept of hellbilly with Agony Column. And today... **IGNITOR**. True metal for true metalheads. The band recently unveiled its fourth album, 'Year Of The Metal Tiger', and afforded me an opportunity to sit down and pick their brains a bit.

Mass Movement: Welcome to Mass Movement!

Ignitor (**Jason McMaster/Stuart Laurence**): Thank you!

MM: 'Year Of The Metal Tiger' is out. I listened to it at least 30 times before writing my review

of the album and I posed the question 'The most metal album ever?'. What do you think?

Stuart Laurence: Ladies and gentlemen, this is an exhibition not a competition. Please, no wagering! That being said, Metal was the only goal, focus, or concern in the conception and development of this record. Only the weak or puny were harmed during its execution and aftermath.

Jason McMaster: It's pretty fooking metal. As far as power metal goes, and New Wave Of British Heavy Metal, speed metal, whatever... it's all there. As well, I think that the Accept influences and the Mercyful Fate influences show the same rock riff sides, just as much as an angular riff. Stuart can make simple riffs, rock riffs, fit into the darker format – just like Mercyful Fate and Accept. But, yes, the return to TRUE METAL is apparent on this record. It's no accident.

MM: I wanted Stuart's input as the writer of all the music (with 2 songs co-written by Beverly Barrington) as well as all of the lyrics. Any insight on the writing process – germination of ideas, overriding concept, etc.?

Stuart Laurence: The stories on this record reflect my acceptance that there is no god. It's something I have known for a long time, but avoided embracing. That is probably kinda cute or quaint to the battle-hardened metalhead, but for me it was a difficult conclusion. Though not mentioned outright, all the songs are about religion in one way or another. This



theme is mostly in the subtext, a read-between-the-lines thing. You could easily take all the songs at face value and miss this. 'Heavy Metal Holocaust' is a cartoony look at good vs. evil, but in the end it is a loophole in the devil's design, not god, that saves the world. 'Beast In Black' is about faith. A Christian crusader thinks he is going to be rewarded a 'prize in white' for his deeds in faith. The subtext is, he is a murderer and will face the 'Beast In Black'. 'Raiders From The Void' is about humanism. It is the loss of human compassion that destroys the world, not the loss of god. 'Shadow Of The Needle' is also about faith. It's about a man that is convinced he is possessed by the Egyptian goddess Sekhmet, and murders people to avenge the god Ra. The subtext here is: how is this person any different from anyone who kills in the name of their god? Meaning, the Sekhmet guy is insane. 'Island Of The Damned' is



about a slave ship that gets possessed by evil spirits conjured by a Voodoo priest who is among the slaves. The ship's crew pray to their Christian god for salvation from 'these unholy savages', then get their just deserts when they arrive at the Island Of The Damned. 'The Kaiser' is about Humanism. I just took a few quotes from Wilhelm II (he was a very snappy dresser) and used them completely out of context! The point of the song is: love is power and a life of purpose is everyone's birthright. 'We Are IGNITOR' is about the true religion of METAL. Our 'gods' are real men and women that

have left tangible and indelible marks on our lives and our world. We do not have to blindly believe in them, we can hear their voices and message with a click of a button. IGNITOR will defend and praise these emissaries of truth forever. It's no big deal if the listener doesn't get all this. One of my all time favorite bands is Mercyful Fate and I could never understand what King Diamond was saying except 'My soul belongs to Satan! Yaaaaaaaaaaaaa!' – I got that one.

MM: Ignitor's previous album, 'The Spider Queen', had a definite concept. It told a great story. This one feels like it has at least a loose theme – heavy metal. But in the early days of metal, all the bands wrote songs about metal so maybe that's how all of this fits?

Stuart Laurence: As I said before, lyrically, 'Year Of The Metal Tiger' has a 'religion is bunk' theme, but the music is all classic metal. To me the big contrast between 'The Spider Queen' and 'Year Of The Metal Tiger' is musical inspiration. When I wrote the music for 'The Spider Queen' I was listening to the soundtracks for the movies 'Flash Gordon' and 'The Rocky Horror Picture Show'. So 'The Spider Queen' has a glam rock/art rock vibe woven into the music; it's not all metal. For some metalheads that was a problem. On this record, I wanted to stick to classic metal through and through.

MM: And there's a good reason for the title 'Year Of The Metal Tiger' – can you elaborate?

Stuart Laurence: I wrote the songs for 'Year Of The Metal Tiger' in 2010 and we recorded the basic tracks at the end of 2010. In Chinese astrology 2010

is the Metal Tiger. They have a 12-year cycle represented by animals, and every two years is characterized by elemental attributes – you know, wood, metal, etc. Beverly suggested this as a title and I thought it was cool, particularly after I came up with the cover art. I thought it looked very NWOBHM. I guess a lot of people think we're being literal and called our album something random like 'Week Of The Disco Chicken', but no, that was not our intent. To be completely honest, I just wasn't that worried about the title.

MM: I hear nods to Mercyful Fate/King Diamond, Accept, and Judas Priest, both in the songwriting and in the execution. Jason, in particular, flat-out nails both the creepy exhortations ('without metal all is lost...' in 'Heavy Metal Holocaust', for example) and the ear-piercing shrieks of King Diamond, and also captures the stylistic feel of Udo Dirkschneider and Rob Halford during certain parts. 'Raiders From The Void' may be the best example, damn! There isn't really a question here, haha!

Jason McMaster: All of your references are indeed correct again... no accident. I love all of those vocalists you mention – can't you tell?! But the style is set in this band. There is no messin' around, it's a direct target of style here. The drama I give to certain lines... like you said, they have to be there or the lyric and lines won't work at all. If you sing and attack everything in tempo time, and just sing proper, it's boring and doesn't ever achieve liftoff. The goals were obvious on this record.

Stuart Laurence: One thing that is great about working with Jason is that when we started learning these songs, I just gave Jason a lyric sheet.

I did not have to give him a melody or direction at all. He knows the genre so well that he immediately sang the songs how I imagined them to sound. He paraphrased a lot of lyrics to get them to fit appropriately, and he wrote one of the verses in 'Raiders From The Void' because I had not written enough lyrics for him.

MM: So – aside from what you've already mentioned – would you mind discussing influences, in general and in specific terms both for the writing and the execution of this album?

Stuart Laurence: Several of the songs had specific inspiration for the music: 'Island Of The Damned' and 'The Kaiser' was Accept; 'Raiders From The Void' I wrote the next day after seeing the thrash band Havok; 'Shadow Of The Needle' I wrote after a day of listening to Yngwie Malmsteen. The other songs were more general. Any metal I write will have Mercyful Fate inspiration. The last 10 seconds of 'Heavy Metal Holocaust' is an Ozzy, a Judas Priest, and a Metallica riff snippet mashed together!

Jason McMaster: It's all over the place. But as far as metal, the old school has all been firmly mentioned here already.

MM: How about some thoughts on heavy metal in general? Past, present, future....

Jason McMaster: 'That Metal Show' [on VH-1 Classic] is a great forum and a brilliant way to hear what heavy metal is about – past, present, and future. My views are about the same. Not to just give the TV show the credit, though it is deserved. I feel like metal has changed as much as it has been constant. There are so many old school metal bands trying to make sure that it's kept real.



MM: Back to 'Year Of The Metal Tiger'. I was going to ask if you care to discuss specific songs – 'Raiders From The Void' is my favorite, if I have to choose one today, by the way – lyrically or musically or otherwise....

Stuart Laurence: See above!

MM: Touché! 'Shadow Of The Needle' has a bit of an Iron Maiden feel, and references ancient Egypt but also seems as if it could be about addiction. Maybe both. Any insights or would you prefer to let the lyrics speak for themselves, let each listener decide what it means to him or her?

Stuart Laurence: The story is about a modern man that believes he is possessed by the goddess Sekhmet, the daughter of the Egyptian sun god Ra. In Egyptian mythology, Sekhmet was sent to earth to destroy humans who had stopped worshipping Ra. This guy believes he just one of many killers chosen by Sekhmet over the years to continue this punishment of non-believers. Today, there are three ancient Egyptian obelisks in three western cities: New York, London, and Paris. They are all in public parks. This guy believes he has to kill 9 people, three in each city. It starts in New York where he waits at the base of the obelisk in the morning for someone to walk into its shadow. That is how the victim is chosen.

Jason McMaster: I really feel that 'Shadow Of The Needle' is coming from the Mercyful Fate vein. It's got plenty of parts and has lots of crazy vocals... but it's not wrong to say that it's got more to it than just that.

MM: 'We Are IGNITOR'. You've gotta give me something on this one. The theme song!

Jason McMaster: The good, the PRIDE of a metal band. This one has a Manowar feel as far as it being thematic to the band and what it stands for – raising the banner and being true to something that might not be cool to the non-believers. We have our own reasons to play metal. We have the feeling that those reasons will exactly match those of many headbangers.

Stuart Laurence: Like Jason said, this one is just a classic Manowar-style battle hymn.

MM: I don't want to bore you with specific questions about every song, but would not be disappointed if you had more to say on each one.

Jason McMaster: ‘Heavy Metal Holocaust’ could be a video game where you can play the roles of Ozzy Osbourne or Randy Rhoads, or the zombie Army soldier, or the opponent who is the devil. The battle is over – who is the true savior of metal, keeping it alive even though some think it to be dead? Just skimming through these songs... ‘Raiders From The Void’ has an apocalyptic thing, the future of living post-nuclear war. Very old school. Darker than Judas Priest, but I agree with you that it has that vibe. ‘Shadow Of The Needle’ is still my favorite. It’s about Cleopatra’s needles, which are giant carved stones that are believed to be a tool of death to those who were not loyal to the ancient god Ra. If you were caught in the shadow of these pyres you were put to death. The legend is supposedly true that many were murdered in this manner of religious execution. ‘Island Of The Damned’ seems obvious – a slave ship full of dread and downtrodden to be released onto an island of exile. ‘The Kaiser’ has the drama, the story of desire and fate of the family, and love from a true maiden, as well as a kingdom.

Stuart Laurence: See above!

MM: Just keep telling me that, Stuart, please! Haha! ‘Year Of The Metal Tiger’ is Jason’s second album with Ignitor (the first being 2009’s ‘The Spider Queen’). Listening to this album, I’d say things are going well. Sounds like a tight band working together, all cylinders firing in order.

Stuart Laurence: Every time I record an album I learn how to do things better. I think with ‘Year Of The Metal Tiger’ we really hit on an efficient recording process the delivered the best performances and best sounds.

Jason McMaster: These songs came together as

easily as those on ‘The Spider Queen’. And you’re spot on – when Stuart gets going and flowing, it’s time to rehearse.

MM: Ignitor definitely feels like a band, not a project or a ‘supergroup’, despite the pedigrees in play. Stuart, if you only knew how obsessed I’ve been with Agony Column’s ‘Brave Words And Bloody Knuckles’ (the album and the song) since its release... I was working for a large chain record store when it was released and got in so much trouble from corporate for participating in the label’s promotional contest for in-store displays, which had to contain meat along with the posters for some reason. Jason, astute MM readers know the bulk of the list: Watchtower, Dangerous Toys, Broken Teeth, Evil United.... And you’ve got Pat Doyle in the band. Punk/hardcore has been as big a part of my life as metal, and Offenders... I couldn’t form a question here if I tried for hours. Wow.

Jason McMaster: It’s been a blast working with cohorts like these. We all have the respect, and we are all music nerds, so it’s just like we’ve all been in a band since time began – or since music like this began. ‘Part of a scene’ is a good way to see it.

Stuart Laurence: Thanks, I’m glad you still like that record. Jason is right, the members of Ignitor are all great folk and are fun to work with.

MM: Both of you – all of Ignitor, really – have other current musical outlets outside of the band, including some where various members of Ignitor play together. Care to discuss this, give some info on your other projects and how they help you out individually and as a band?



Jason McMaster: Other than the obvious reason we play and write together, the story is fact – that Stu and I were rehearsing with our Judas Priest tribute band, Sad Wings, and he was telling us about Ignitor vocal auditions. I offered my services – at least to do the record. I felt like trying to help keep Ignitor on the map. The band was too good to be lost, and it had been a year or so at that time since Ignitor had a full-time vocalist. That was three years ago or so. I really just felt like I needed to be full-time when I heard the material. Done.

Stuart Laurence: Yeah, Jason and I do the Sad Wings thing. I was doing the Agony Column thing again until Richie got thrown back in jail a few weeks ago. Pat is in a rock band called El Pathos.

Brendon plays bass in a popular honky-tonk band called Two Hoots And A Holler.

MM: There are definitely some Texas dates coming up for Ignitor. What about shows across the rest of the US or in Europe?

Stuart Laurence: No dates outside Texas are scheduled yet.

MM: What's next for Ignitor? Whatever it is, don't put this baby to bed.

Jason McMaster: Time to start writing again. It won't be long 'til Stu is writing another opus.

MM: The floor is yours, gentlemen. Absolutely anything you'd like to say about anything at all.

Jason McMaster: Support what you love and wear it with pride. Don't follow the trends of others. Make sure your shoes fit.

Stuart Laurence: I'd like to thank you for the great review, the interview, and for your support.

MM: Well, I can't thank you enough for your time. Can you leave us with all the pertinent information needed to find out more about the band and the album, websites and contact details and all that good stuff?

Jason McMaster: The best way to get Ignitor news and hear songs, watch old and new video, and read all about it is to go toreverbNation.com/ignitor [Note: You can also follow the band on Twitter at twitter.com/IgnitorMetal and you can follow Jason at twitter.com/jasonmcmaster]

MM: Stay metal.

Jason McMaster: Amen.

Stuart Laurence: You first.

