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VITAL VINYL: KOMMANDANT'S JAMES BRESNAHAN TALKS 'STORMLEGION' LP

by Chuck Armstrong May 21, 2014 4:47 PM

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In 2008, Chicago's extreme metal act Kommandant released their debut full-length album, 'Stormlegion.' Thirteen tracks of dark, raw and cohesive metal, 'Stormlegion' was initially only released as a CD. Five years later, the band is celebrating the vinyl release of the album.

Guitarist and founding member James Bresnahan — who played guitar for Cianide in the late '90s — took some time to chat with Loudwire about the history of Kommandant, what it means to have 'Stormlegion' pressed on wax and what the future holds for the band. Whether you've been a fan of Kommandant since day one or are now being introduced to them thanks to the vinyl reissue of 'Stormlegion,' rest assured that their brand of metal will please metalheads across the globe.

Kommandant were created in 2005. How does the band look now compared to back then?

I am the only original member left from 2005. I created the band to be a studio project only, and underground demands from the 'Iron Hands on Scandinavia' release influenced me into taking it a step further to become a fully functioning live band. The first lineup was a four-piece and we wore simple street clothes on-stage. The gas mask and uniform look came in around 2007 and is still how we present ourselves today.

You sell merch that says "Hate is Strength" and "United in War." What role does that attitude play in Kommandant's music?

To us, the term "Hate is Strength" expresses the vital need for one's own self-awareness and empowerment. It is not unlike the "Fight or Flight" response, which is instinctual within all human beings during times of duress. A peace treaty and a bouquet of flowers are not appropriate weapons for all situations and that is where we would apply "Hate is Strength." "United in War" can be taken simply as a unification slogan. A nation will unify its people in a unique spirit and unwavering determination that can only be observed during time of war. I am attracted to this spiritual transcendence that takes place, more than the act of war itself.

When listening to 'Stormlegion,' there are points where it sounds incredibly stripped down, almost like it was born out of the early days of black metal. What was the recording process like for this album?

We recorded this in a very modern studio with possible access to all the amenities necessary; therefore, the sound we created was intentional. I actually received a few very negative reviews due to the lack of any guitar solos whatsoever. My approach was to keep the production lean and mean, like the songwriting itself, yet not intentionally lo-fi, like early black metal releases, somewhere in the middle of the two approaches. I had grown tired of the overproduced recordings I was hearing in the late 1990s. The vinyl release remains true to the original recording except that it has been remastered.

What does it mean to you to have 'Stormlegion' released on vinyl for the first time ever?

In a certain sense, 'Stormlegion' is a cursed record. The band was originally signed to Battle Kommand Records in 2007. We were given the money to record the record, but the label decided to not release our album due to lack of funding. BKR folded entirely shortly after that. Next, we had another label interested in us, but we could not find a drummer to record the album for us and were seriously considering a drum machine, which thankfully never happened. A year later, we find two different drummers committed to the project only to see both of them back out at the last minute. Finally, we capture a drummer and the album finally gets recorded and is released by Planet Metal on CD format only. A French label released an exclusive cassette tape version of 'Stormlegion' the next year. Seven years later, we have Chris [Pelletier] at Higher Power to thank for the vinyl version. Needless to say, I am not only proud, but relieved to see 'Stormlegion' released on vinyl.

It's a great vinyl release – not only does the music sound perfect spinning around a turntable, but it's pressed on 180-gram wax and includes a killer poster, sticker and patch. How important do you think vinyl is to the metal community?

Vinyl and its value is now regarded in an entirely different way than it was the 1980s when it was simply a format of music. Unique to the metal style, especially the split 7-inch format, vinyl contains a special unique rite of passage for both the band and the listener. In the current situation, a band sees itself as having arrived when appearing on its first vinyl release. In the late 1980s this was represented as a demo on cassette tape with a Xerox copied black and white J-card, only to give way to the compact disc of the early 1990s. I have personally been a part of this rite of passage within all three formats.

How important is vinyl to you personally?

Vinyl is more important to me as a band member than as a fan and collector. I was big on buying tons of vinyl in the 1990s when you could get records for fairly cheap. I have a lot of records from then that are worth a fortune now. The appearance of Kommandant on vinyl is far more important to me, and we have plans to re-release a few more from our back catalog on the vinyl format. We also are negotiating a couple of split 7-inches for late 2014.

Can you talk about the cover art for 'Stormlegion'?

I wanted something that resembled a war propaganda poster with an art deco, machine-age sensibility. Not sure if I actually achieved that, but I love the cover anyway. It is comprised of two separate actual photographic images, one placed on top of the other. This is also the only release with our old logo font which has been updated to what is seen currently.

It's a nonstop onslaught of metal, and by the end of it, 'Stormlegion' left me feeling out of breath. Where did you draw inspiration from for the album?

As a musician, I had been idle for almost 10 years since leaving Cianide in the late 1990s and was ready to create something purely of my own creation and devoid of outside influence, and that is why I used session musicians only at first. I remember claiming that Kommandant would be the last band that I would involve myself with and that has remained true ever since. I would have to say that only listening and not playing for such a long period created a pent up backlog of ideas that needed to be unleashed and 'Stormlegion' is the result of that.

What's on the horizon for Kommandant?

We are currently in the studio recording our new full length album for a late 2014 release. This will be our last for our label ATMF, after which we become a free agent. Our 2012 release, 'The Draconian Archetype,' will be re-released on both vinyl and CD format through Higher Power sometime later this year. The future of live appearances is very bright for us in the future, and we hope to return back to Europe to show our face again in the near future.

Get the reissue of Kommandant's 'Stormlegion' on vinyl for the first time ever right here.

Kommandant, 'Stormlegion'





