

STEMM

by Morgan Y. Evans



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There's a stereotype of metal as the soundtrack to people beating the shit out of each other out of anger, or even for fun and profit. Sometimes, that stereotype is all too true and as they say, if the shoe fits, plant that damn thing up someone's ass pronto, head bangers! Niagara Falls, New York's favorite road dogs Stemm manifest this principle in the best way on their new album *Blood Scent* (on Catch 22 Records). It's a varied and solid metal record that they earned into existence through willpower and skill. This is a band that will not slow down but will play nice... a cadre for their growing army of fans who give them the respect they deserve. It's all about giving back to your own.

The UFC and Stemm make a great fit, as these dudes are real trench warfare guys, out on the road and putting their full lives into music. It's not just a career battle, it is their lives. It translates into the power of the songs, adding impact to the more physical parts of the band's tunes that some groups have to think about to get to. It's just been announced that the hard working band's well deserving "House Of Cards" single has been selected as the of theme Joe Rogan's *UFC Wired* program. A great match up, and hopefully will do for Stemm what "Bodies" did for Drowning Pool, as I like the chorus of this one more; it's about keeping your wits sharp as well as using force.

Stemm are passionate and true, wearing their influences and enthusiasm for different eras of metal, even while heavy rock doesn't always rule the charts these days. These believers could fit on a bill with metalcore like Unearth or with melodic titans like Life of Agony just as well. Stemm are a real band who embody a region's frustration yet also embrace the outside world with identity intact, their eyes peeled and knives sharpened. There is a human side and a raw element, like the vibe of Louisiana's Down influenced (but still their own rumbling beast of carnival purity) No Room For Saints or the hyper crust-grind space anthems of the also-dreadlocked and very mighty Sulaco (from Rochester, New York). It's something you can't fake and is called being yourself. It shines through when you are and if you aren't in some way every time, and you can learn to spot it. It is usually most obvious in a live setting, and Stemm definitely ring true when you put them in front of a crowd, who sing along and pump fists faithfully. They know that this band is working hard and legit, paying the price and putting the hours in.

Blood Scent ranges from raging yet soaring controlled free for alls, from the well produced but definitely acutely energetic "Awake", which seethes underneath that polished veneer. Many bands mess this up, losing punch or passionate energy but Stemm manage to still sound genuine while not sacrificing an inch of their dynamic spirit. "Blood Soaked" is monstrous and rages like Slipknot verses Blood Simple trying to out seduce a lonely crocodile at the town petting zoo. I ran out of steam there trying to even come close to accurately describing how hard charging this track is, just stomping madness with bass, drums and guitars attacking viciously before parting into a sea of torn throat melody, mood shifts and groove-metal with a "have no fear, metal is here, motherfucker" guitar solo to embed in your skull to boot!

I had a great conversation with Stemm's self-proclaimed "guitarist who sings" Joe Cafarella (there's a lot of fans who like to sing along with him, whatever the case may be) and ferocious yet chill guitarist Alex Scouton on the night of *Blood Scent's* release. Brutal!

MORGAN Y. EVANS: It's a big day for you guys! How do you even put into words how important it is to you?

JOE CAFARELLA: Well, it's been a lot of hard work. Being able to watch it unfold today is pretty cool, but we still have a lot to do.

MYE: Listening to the album, there's a good mix of...you can tell you are a good live band and it doesn't feel hacked together in a studio. Sometimes you can fake it, but I don't think it would be easy to fake what you guys did on this album. There's songs that sound catchier but don't seem forced. It's a really good blend of mainstream hard rock stuff and underground metal.

JC: Thank you, man. Appreciate that. Thank you for noticing.

MYE: [laughing]

ALEX SCOUTON: We love the album. We love the diversity of the album. We've been sitting on it since May so it's such a relief to share it with everyone else. It's a long time to have a labor of love waiting.

MYE: Was it delayed for the right marketing window?

AS: Cross your t's and dot your i's, that's exactly it. Having the launch be as successful as could be.

MYE: Definitely. You guys have been getting the fans motivated. It's cool to see all the kids online that are psyched about you guys.

JC: The kids are definitely, just as with any other band, absolutely the lifeblood of this band. We've always tried to make the band aware they are the reason we're always able to rise to a higher level. We're the guys that put out the music and they're the ones that run out to the masses sayin', "You gotta hear this band! You gotta hear this band!" So loyal to us, it is amazing. We've actually gotten calls and emails from people already saying some stores didn't have *Blood Scent* and they were starting arguments at the stores! [laughing]

MYE: We'll kick your ass! [laughing]

JC: They were very upset that they didn't get their copies. People that live in our hometown were trying to get us to meet up with them tonight or tomorrow so we could hook them up with the CDs that we have on hand.

MYE: I wish you guys the best. You sound like a real New York metal band with a regional identity. You've been in the trenches and did the last show ever with Damageplan and got with the UFC and they've been pushing you. It's cool you've got so many styles involved and it sounds like one band.

JC: Well thanks, man. We're more old school. We really do look up to bands like Pantera and Metallica and stuff like that. When we went into writing this CD we really did think of how amazing it was when *Vulgar Display Of Power* came out. You had "Mouth For War" on there, but you also had "Fucking Hostile" and "This Love". Then you also had "Hollow".

MYE: My favorite Pantera song.

JC: Yeah. Same with Metallica. They had "Sanitarium" and "Battery" both on *Master Of Puppets*. We wanted to have that type of feeling instead of every song being balls to the wall heavy. We wanted to add our own element to it. So that was the goal and we think we achieved it.

MYE: "Beneath My Skin" is a good song. I dig it. It has a big rock sound and reminds me of Audioslave or Days Of The New but with your own flare. It has "radio" elements but not in a fake way, to me. "House Of Cards" got on Joe Rogan's *UFC Wired* as the theme song. That one has a huge chorus your fans will love to sing but is really, really heavy elsewhere and hard charging.

JC: The UFC people are real good to us, man. We've been working with them for about five years. When we got the new CD to them they said within 5 weeks that they might have another opportunity for us to be on another show, and when we found out it was for *UFC Wired* with Joe Rogan, for us it was great because we heard Joe picked the song himself. It's still an honor to mix extreme music with extreme sport.

MYE: What are some of the cooler fighters you've met? Not what. Who!

JC: We met Chuck Liddell. We actually had a beer with Chuck Liddell in Atlantic City. Randy Couture. Tim Sylvia. Ken Shamrock. The first time we were ever out with the UFC we did a photo shoot and Tim Sylvia was hanging outside the ring, and after the photo shoot we started brawling in the ring and fighting and Tim thought we were pretty funny and came up, so now if we're nearby he remembers who we are and always makes a point to come and say hello.

MYE: Very cool.

JC: We've met a lot of fighters. It's pretty intimidating to be around those guys.

MYE: You didn't want to challenge Tim or nothin'?

AS: No, no. I told him he didn't want none of this.

MYE: The name *Blood Scent* sounds very metal. It could obviously mean being "in for the kill" or something like that but it reminds me of survival. When you smell danger in nature. You guys are out there giving it your all as an underground band.

AS: This album is really a long unremitting...how do I say this...can I drop the "F-bomb"? Is that cool.

MYE: Have no qualms. Don't worry about that around this magazine. [laughing]

AS: It is an unremitting FUCK OFF to those who've done us wrong for the last four years or so.

MYE: Amen, man.

AS: Fighting for survival and to keep the band together cohesively in the face of a lot of dickheads that'd like to do us wrong. We are still standing here and it's like we have the scent of their blood in our noses. We're on the attack.

MYE: You can tell even just from checking the band out that you care about what you're doing. Was there anytime growing up near Niagara Falls where you thought music wasn't going to work out and you wanted to do the whole barrel over the falls thing?

JC: [laughing] Every day! Every time you drive down any side street in Niagara Falls the only thing you can think of is just getting as far away as you can be. It's a really easy way to get out of town, make friends and score free alcohol.

MYE: What do you guys think of the Buffalo Bills this year? I'm a New York Giants fan going on back since 1989 and '90 and I miss when we used to play you guys in the Superbowl. [laughing] I was actually rooting for the Bills over the Patriots the other day because I hate them so much.

JC: Everyone hates the Patriots. The Patriots fans hate the Patriots! But as far as the Bills go, professional sports in the Western, NY, it's hard to be a fan. You have to be a survivalist and be able to be dropped off in the woods with a pocket knife and fend for yourself!

MYE: [cracking up]

JC: You don't want to be a fan of any Buffalo franchise.

MYE: For diehards.

JC: Exactly.

MYE: So this release day has arrived and you've got touring looming and everything. What are you looking forward to the most?

AS: Just that, being able to go out and support it and make new fans everywhere. That's what it's all about.

MYE: Joe, you've been handling main vocals for awhile. Has it been hard managing material from when (former vocalist) T.J. Frost was a part of the band and you had two main vocals going? You've done a really great job taking it over and stepping up into that role. How did you

adjust your comfort level?

JC: Thanks, man. I was very, very reluctant to take over the full vocal duty. I didn't want it and fought with these guys day and night about it to the point where we brought in others to try but it didn't work out. We could feel the unity among us and it isn't that people did such a bad job coming in there, but we realized it was already self-contained. On the days after someone auditioned to be in the band, these guys pushed me and I would just end up sitting in. .It seemed like when it was just the four of us we'd end up getting along great.

MYE: That's how it goes sometimes.

JC: There was nothing to interfere with any of our plans and we started getting more and more productive, and I just fell into it. Stemm has always been a two vocalist band, pretty much, and so trying to turn some of those old songs into a one vocalist song was damn near impossible. I do take on a lot more vocal duties and stuff, but (bassist) Steve (Crowl) is kind of like the verse man and he'll let me take a breath or get a line in. He'll take over for a line or two.

MYE: Hype it up.

JC: Yeah, so I don't pass out on stage while I'm playing. 'Cuz me and T.J. always had it constant. One voice constantly moving between the songs. Right now I'm very comfortable with it, as much as I didn't want it a year ago when the change happened. You couldn't pry the microphone out of my hands right now.

MYE: Good, man. Good to hear also since you've got a lot of jamming to do in support of this thing coming up.

JC: Thanks, man. I'm just starting to realize that. I'm just starting to feel this way about myself. I've honestly always thought I'm not a singer. I'm a guitarist. I look at it as a guitarist that sings.

MYE: Sometimes that translates to people as a working man's approach of using what you've got and it sounds more genuine anyway.

JC: Yeah, that's true, and most singers are assholes.

MYE: [laughing] Hey! I am a singer. I am an asshole. [laughing]

JC and AS: [laughing]

MYE: On that note, on an unprofessional note I'm gonna start lighting a joint to celebrate your guy's album release.

JC: I think...Steve, our bass player is in the corner and he's... lighting a bowl!

MYE: Alright.

JC: He's goin' toe to toe with you right now.

MYE: [exhaling] Alright, man. We'll pass through the phone. One more thing on that point of line ups though is that you, early on, were Stemm and Five Years Gone and combined those two bands to become this entity. You don't need new blood because you are still discovering yourselves.

JC: Right. That was absolutely it. We've all literally been on this music scene in the Buffalo area for a long time. We'd known each other ten years plus, but we had never jammed with each other until we started this new chapter in Stemm. It's better than bringing in somebody new that we know nothing about. You know what I mean? The four of us know when we can push ourselves over the limit. To bring in somebody fresh where we don't know is just inviting problems.

MYE: Good luck with it. It will be awesome to see. How did Mike Hatalak from It Dies Today get back on the boards and as a guest guitarist on the song "Blood Soaked"?

AS: Mike produced *Songs For The Incurable Heart* and we all went about our business, and as we were working on this new album he sort of sprung up. Serendipity. I'll try and pick a smaller word...

MYE: Fate.

AS: We had done a recording for Metal Edge magazine of “Poopmouth” and he produced that in record time. In a handful of hours! It was really cool. As soon as that was done he turned to us and said, “Now, what about the new album?” Everyone is really comfortable with him. He’s an awesome guy and has an amazing ear. When he is critical and you come away and change your part, it’s better for it.

MYE: It’s cool ‘cuz his involvement is tied to what’s come before *Blood Scent* but is ushering in a new chapter as well.

AS: Exactly. I can’t imagine a guy we’d have been more comfortable with especially considering how different some of the songs are from the last album.

MYE: Creativity will take you places. It’ll all sound really good live, I bet.

JC: Hopefully we’ll hit the road in mid-February for our U.S. tour and then we can meet up and you and Steve can smoke in person. Steve says you bring the weed and he’ll help smoke it with you.

MYE: [laughing] Dudes, really... thanks a lot.

AS: Morgan, man, thanks a hell of a lot for your support. We appreciate it.