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Interviews: Interview with OVERHEAD Guitarist Jaakko Kettunen

Posted on Saturday, September 26 @ 12:39:58 EDT

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Jaakko Kettunen: Right Here, Right Now by Tommy "Hashman" Hash



One look at the cover of the *Live After All* DVD and you would think that frontman Alex Keskitalo is an Ian Anderson impersonator, but looks can be deceiving for Finland's **Overhead** are not a Jethro Tull tribute band nor do they even sound like them (more like a heavier version of Proto-Kaw or The Tangent) - this quintet is a musical entity unto themselves. Having formed at the dawn of the new millennium, releasing their first disc titled *Zumanthum* back in 2002, the band has quite a feat of achievements leading up to their current record *And We're Not Here After All*, which has included numerous compilation appearances and festival gigs.

Falling in line with a new era of melodic progressive rock bands such as Believe, Touchstone, and Gazpacho, where there tends to be this 'neo' coining placed upon musical 'standings' of bands like these, it almost seems as this typecasting is unfair to be put on this band or any band for that matter (yes, we are all guilty of saying stuff like that, including this scribe) - that's probably best left that up to the band, yet it might help lead a particular audience their way. After years of playing out their tunes, they are on the verge of becoming a bigger name in the world of melodic prog-rock and guitarist **Jaakko Kettunen** speaks to us about what has, and what will entail from this quintet.

We have found our style and our strong-points and the music keeps on progressing all the time," begins **Kettunen** about the band's evolution, "I think each album has been better than its predecessors and each year the live shows get better and better. We've played a lot together and have become a tight unit and a very good live band. We play very well together now and it's easy to work with these guys, we know each other so well now."

As elaborate as the conceptual and cinematic their musical approach, the inspiration is something that tends to be more down-to-earth as the guitarist explains, "I'm inspired by the things that surround us: The music I listen to, the playing of my band mates and other musicians I jam with, life in general with its ups and downs, and sometimes things like movies...and of course we drink a lot of coffee."

Many are familiar with many of the Finnish Progressive Music Association *Colossus*, for they have produced multi-faceted epic projects such as *Treasure Island*, *7 Samurai*, & *The Spaghetti Epic* amongst others - the projects usually feature about three or four bands, each playing an extended piece of music that pertains to the story; however musically, it's a different story - **Overhead** has

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contributed to many of these compilation appearances in cooperation with *Colossus*, "We were asked to participate by *Colossus*," elaborates **Kettunen**, "which set up those projects. "Kalevala" is the Finnish national epic and we thought it would be an interesting project to do. And for the latest project *Tuonen Tytar 2*, which is a tribute to old Finnish prog, we wanted to participate with a song by Tabula Rasa, because we had already played that song occasionally in the past and we like it a lot. Alex's uncle actually wrote the lyrics for that song, so there's another connection, and we thought we could get some extra coverage by taking part in those projects."

Kettunen also states that Finland does have a scene for prog, but it's not this massive entity that most would love for it to be, "Well, there are some good bands and good concerts every now and then, and there's the fore mentioned Colossus organization. But it surely wouldn't hurt to have more things happening in this area of music, have more venues open minded for prog and such - but maybe people in general have become more open minded to all kinds of music. More and more people seem to be finding us."

Keyboardist Tarmo Simonen has his own studio, and that has been place where the band has laid their tracks down, "We record all our albums by ourselves in his (Simonen's) studio. That's the best way for us to work, with out any pressures of time running out or anyone telling us what to do. We have total musical freedom to create the kind of music we like the best. Tarmo has become a very good and experienced recording engineer, he records a lot of other projects as well. It has become a very relaxed, productive and inspiring way to record for us. On the other hand it takes time but there's no reason to rush good things."



Overhead, with Kettunen, far right

The band made the pilgrimage to film their *Live After All* DVD at the Wyspiański Theater, Katowice, Poland - which has become hallowed ground for progressive rock in Eastern Europe. Like many bands that have played their before them, it was an event that the band will never forget. "A very interesting experience," says **Kettunen**, "it was great to visit and play in Poland. We hadn't played there before but had had a lot of requests by the fans. I guess we were a bit concerned before hand, but we saw how well the production and realized things ran quite smoothly. The whole production crew was very professional, they had obviously done it before. The theater was a beautiful place, although we're not so used to the audience sitting down on a rock concert. During the show I didn't really think about the cameras, it was just great fun to play and I think we played a very decent show. We chose songs from our last two albums that would make an interesting show and that we could fit in the 90 minutes; we couldn't fit in all that we would have wanted. We then mixed the sound track ourselves, so we got the sound and the mix the way we like it. I think the DVD looks and sounds very good, I'm very happy about it. And the after show party was also very enjoyable...although I think our bass player scared the RPWL guys away in a pub."

Going back to the way this band has been coined in the mold as a 'neo/symphonic band - **Kettunen** sheds a bit more light on how he feels the band expresses themselves musically, "Well describing our music with words is difficult, at least for ourselves. You have to use some labels, but if you just coin us as neo-prog or symphonic rock you're not really getting the whole truth I think. There are many sides of Overhead, there's rock, progressive, metal, improvisation, symphonic, melodic, atmospheric, and what not. And all that is wrapped in a comprehensive package. Neo-prog somehow has a bit of a nasty ring in my mind, and we're certainly not trying to copy anyone or anything, but 'progressive rock' is a quite suiting label anyway."

The follow up to the studio album **And We're Not Here After All** is in the works - it will see the band growing in their musical mindset, "Indeed we are. We're in the process of jamming and gathering up ideas," states **Kettunen**, "It's a work in progress, but it seems it will be more rhythmic and adventurous than its predecessors. If *And We're Not Here After All* was somewhat of a vocal oriented and symphonic album, then this new one seems to have more to say also in the instrumental or playing side of things, not forgetting great melodies of course. On a good day of jamming in some ways the album seems to be writing itself, so we'll see how it turns out."

And the highlights in **Overhead's** career...it's all in relation to making the music, "The recording and releasing of the last two albums, *Metaepitome* and *And We're Not Here After All* has meant a lot. As well as all the shows we have played around Europe after those albums. It's really great to see people really appreciate this music and show their appreciation during our gigs. So touring with this band is excellent. And of course now the new DVD is a big highlight. It nicely sums up our work so far and it's good to move on from there."

The forthcoming album will be the main focus for the band at this point and like most bands, they hope to hit the road in support of it, in the meantime, the DVD of *Live After All* will give us a taste of the live

vibe that **Overhead** offers, "I look much forward to start the recording later on," concludes **Kettunen**, "and at some point when the album is in a more ready state we'll start organizing more shows. I look forward to playing around Europe again and maybe overseas in the future as well!"

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