

Overload

2010/17



Behemoth

BY MIKE GREENBLATT

In the Bible, a behemoth, according to "The Book Of Job," is the largest and most powerful animal of them all. Metaphorically speaking, the word has now come to encompass any entity of such greatness, thus, the band Behemoth, alive in Poland since 1991, can lay claim to a gargantuan influence upon a generation of bands.

They call it "blackened death metal." It is, indeed, a sound that can be ugly, yet riveting, hypnotic and enticing, yet repelling. Along with such fellow Poles as those in the bands Vader, Graveland and Sacrilegium, the heathen aesthetic was never more evident. Behemoth, though, has graduated from such sentiments as espoused on its 1995 *Sventevith* debut and its 1996 *Grom* follow-up (which creatively employed acoustic passages and female vocals). Although 1998's *Pandemonic Incantations* (drummer Inferno's impressive debut) and 1999's *Satanica* (in which the band recorded an astounding 64 tracks, which Nergal self-produced) still played in a heathen's playground, such masterful underground cult classics as 2000's *Thelema.6* and 2002's *Zos Kia Cultus* strayed into the deep occult. "Thelema" comes from the Ancient Greek meaning to "force one's will upon," whether that will is God or the Devil. Aleister Crowley, in his 1904 *The Book Of Law*, took it to mean "do what thou wilt," no matter what the consequences. Crowley has had his share of devotees (including Led Zeppelin's Jimmy Page). This hasn't escaped Behemoth's Nergal, who has taken the old black-hearted witch man's philosophy to heart.

Throughout these years, Behemoth also proved itself to be a concert ball buster. Early Euro tours raised more than a few roofs. Their first big-time tour, with Decide and Satyricon, had them arguably blowing both those bands off the stage. Tours in the new century with Morbid Angel and Nile (whom they befriended, shared an interest in Middle Eastern sound and history, and ultimately collaborated with) also proved successful.

Through the years, Behemoth has had its share of infamous former members including drummer Baal Ravenlock; guitarists Seth, Les L. Kaos, Havok and Desecrator; bassists Rafal Brauer, Mafisto, Orcus and Novy. The band today contains guitarist/vocalist Nergal, with bassist Orion, and drummer Inferno, although they employ a second stage guitarist, oftentimes Seth.

In 2004, Behemoth released *Demigod*. In 2006, a compilation boxed set, *Demonica*, proved a completist's dream. In 2007, Behemoth tours in support of *The Apostasy* (not released yet at presstime). One track, "Christgrinding Avenue," though, was made available online as a performance video to whet the appetite of stateside fans prior to the trio's rare OZZfest dates (from a gig at Club 013 in Tilburg, Holland).

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Also in 2007 comes *Chaotica: The Essence Of The Underworld* (MVD Audio). This double-CD retrospective includes 150 minutes from those first few albums, as well as unreleased masters and new artwork. Remixed and remastered, it restores and updates the early sound with today's technology. Highlights include "Wolves Guard My Coffin," "Hell Dwells In Ice" and "The Dark Triumph" (which, originally, was only available on a demo entitled *The Return Of The Northern Moon* in 1992). Nergal was a teenager when he formed this band. His original black metal demos—*From The Pagan Wastelands* and *And The Forests Dream Eternally*—are now collector's items. Another track, "Cursed Angel Of Doom" is from a rare demo tape entitled *Endless Damnation*. A cover of Destruction's "Total Disaster" is released here for the first time, as is a cover of Mayhem's "Freezing Moon."

Recently back from an Israeli tour, Nergal told fans on his website, "this was our second time playing in Israel, and, once again, the show, crowd feedback and the aura around the whole event blew me away! I have no words to describe how much we loved it. I'm happy to see that we have such a strong following in this part of the globe. We also tested out one of our brand new [songs] because of its strong connection to Jerusalem and I was curious how the crowd would respond, but they seemed to enjoy it a lot. Awesome! I tell you they love Satan in the holy land!"

"The day after the show," he continues, "we took a trip to Nazareth, Caesariae (the Roman city built by Herod, also the place where Jesus was sentenced by Pontius Pilate!) and the ancient city of Megiddo (the Biblical Armageddon, the place where the final battle between heaven's troops and forces of Satan will take place; guess you already know what I'm going to write about on the next album). It was one hell of a trip: an amazing show combined with [an] unforgettable history lesson in one of the most exciting places on Earth. Not bad, if you ask me!" •