

# SOLITUDE AETURNUS

## Destination Desolation

It's a good time to be a traditional doom metal fan. After years of inactivity from some of the genre's most beloved acts, the past year or so has seen a glut of new and archival material made available. From the Pentagram and Bedemon rarities collections through Trouble's reissues and new studio effort to the solid new Candlemass album — not to mention excellent new efforts by young bands such as Isole and The Gates Of Slumber — we've seen a wealth of riches unleashed.

The band that has arguably seen the most activity after an extended layoff is Dallas, TX's Solitude Aeternus. More than eight years passed between the release of their last album, 1998's excellent *Adagio*, and the much-awaited North American issue of their newest studio offering, *Alone*, in April of this year. Since its release Stateside, the band has entered one of its busiest periods ever.

With recent remastered re-releases of their first two albums, vocalist Robert Lowe's noteworthy debut as the new voice of Candlemass and the quintet's first ever live DVD quietly sliding onto store shelves in late August, these Texan troubadours of doom are now back in the public eye in a way they haven't been in over a decade. Which begs the answer to one simple question: Where the hell have they been?

"It's funny how years just creep by," laughs vocalist Robert Lowe. "It ended up being eight years and it was mostly just people's situations and problems."

"After *Adagio*, we played a few big fests but typical things in life change," says Lowe. "We decided to take a break for a year or two and then come back in a couple of years to see how everybody was feeling. [Guitarist] Edgar [Rivera] at the time wanted to do other stuff too. He was considering doing movie soundtrack work and then he ended up running off from the band."

"We had some other things to do," adds guitarist John Perez. "I was pursuing my [Brainticket] label activities more and I had a second album I did of psychedelic music called Liquid Sound Company. The other guys went and did a little side project: Steve Moseley had written a bunch of music that he wanted to use and they called it Concept Of God. They were doing gigs in 2000/2001 and recorded an album, which will be released soon."

"After all that, it was about two years before we reconvened and rehearsed," says Perez. "Our rehearsals take forever: We all live far apart so we were getting together once a week maybe. That adds up to four times a month times 12 — that's not many rehearsals. It took us a year before Edgar decided to leave. That was a big blow for me, because Edgar's guitar playing was a really classic and integral part of the Solitude sound, no doubt about it. Replacing him is impossible and I had always said that if he ever quit I would pretty much just can the band."

"I sat around for about six months feeling sorry for myself not sure what to do," says Perez about the aftermath of Rivera's departure. "It took a long time before we started to pick the pieces up again and Steve Moseley, who'd been playing bass for us, just took over on guitar. He's primarily a guitar player so it was a natural choice. We worked together for about a year almost just getting together ideas and it worked out. Then we all got back together again and about three or four months later our drummer quit. That set us back again."

Unfortunately that wasn't to be the end of the personnel problems for the band, as Lowe explains.

"So John Covington leaves and we had to find another drummer. We end up getting these temporary replacements on bass and drums and carry on like that for nearly a year until we decide this wasn't the right lineup. So we had to start all over again and get yet

another drummer and another bass player and work them in and that took some time too. And there were other things involved too. Those basically cost us a couple of years' worth of time."

"I just don't think the pieces were fitting together with them," explains Perez regarding the first new rhythm section's dismissal, "and it had to be right. I am way more into quality than quantity. Since there's nothing that really comes out of this other than the quality of what you put out, that's the most important thing to me. We had to make a hard decision. Those were nice guys but it just wasn't happening."

"We then got Steve Nichols on drums. It's ironic; he was one of the first drummers to try out for the band way back in 1988. We had already decided on Covington at that time so Steve didn't get the gig. 15 years later he tried out again and got it because he's a great drummer. He fits in perfectly. Our current bassist James Martin is an old friend of ours too. He's been around the music scene longer than anybody. He was a member of the Concept Of God project that Robert and Steve had done. Now we finally have a solid and stable lineup."

With years and years now past, the band finally got to a level of stability and went back to doing what they do best — crafting well-constructed, heavy-as-fuck traditional doom. It would take a few more years before they finally hit the studio to record, but when they did, they knew the songs that would eventually make it on to the *Alone* album inside out.

"There's not a song on *Alone* that isn't at least three or four years old," says Perez. "These were songs that primarily Steve Moseley and I wrote together back in early 2002. Because of the problems we had getting to where we're at, we had a lot of time on our hands and made good use of it. We made sure the songs were the best they could be."

"I think it paid off," says the guitarist of the attention paid to the detail of their songcraft. "I think we came out with a really great record that just sort of trimmed all the fat. All the songs have been nitpicked to death. Sometimes that doesn't pay off and you can over-analyze, but in this case I was glad that happened."

"I couldn't be happier with *Alone*," says Lowe when asked for his feelings on the album. "I used to think *Adagio* was my favorite Solitude Aeternus album, but for me this one definitely beats it. I'm happy with every one of the tracks and I think the rest of the guys felt the same way too once we finally knocked it out."

Recorded at Texas' Nomad Studio in the summer of 2006, *Alone* was originally released in Europe late in 2006 by Massacre, who stuck by the band through all of their inner turmoil and personnel changes. It would be another six months before the album would finally be issued Stateside through the Locomotive label, which released it here in early April.

"I said this about the last album too," adds Perez, "but I really do think this album is our best and I can quantify that and make it valid. I'm a fan of Solitude Aeternus just as much as I am in the band, so I am pretty honest when it comes to listening back to it. So if you're honest and you listen to it, you'll see that it has all the elements of what we've done in the past just brought up a little bit differently on this record."

"The most important thing for us is that we're not necessarily doing anything so twisted and unique here that you can't relate. There's definitely a famili-

ty to the stuff we do but the songs I just think are good heavy metal songs. They're as good as anything we've ever done. The older albums may be more classic to people; that's just because they came out 15 years ago, you heard it first, got blown out by it and that's your favorite, no matter what. Honestly, these songs are as good as anything on the first record and certainly as good as anything on any of the other records."

"That said," adds Perez "the production on this album is by far the best we've ever had. I much prefer the sound of this record to the ones we've done before. It's the closest I've ever gotten to the sound I'm hearing in my head. Steve had a big hand in the production of this too. He has a great ear and that made us have a great heavy sounding record. This has the biggest, thickest production value we've ever had and that's a big issue — that's why it's the best record."

Late 2006 also saw remastered, expanded reissues of the band's first two albums — 1991's *Into The Depths Of Sorrow* and 1992's *Beyond The Crimson Horizon* — released through Poland's Metal Mind Productions. Issued in numbered edition digipacks that were limited to 2000 copies worldwide, they are part of Metal Mind's ongoing deal with Roadrunner to release classic, out-of-print titles from the imprint's impressive back catalog.

Perez himself had reissued the band's debut on his Brainticket label a few years back, only to have to shelf it after a few months. "I could find nothing in our contracts that stated Roadrunner had eternal rights to those releases [which apparently they do] so after a while I just decided to release them on my own. I put it out because people were paying \$60 a piece for it on eBay. I didn't remaster it; I wanted it to sound like how it came out and I wanted to stay true to that for better or for worse. I just wanted it to be available and be available in its original form."

"We did 1000 copies on Brainticket and Roadrunner called me up and said 'hey, we still own the rights, quit doing that.' They asked me to stop selling them and I did."

Of course, the Metal Mind reissues are the real deal and with that being the case, the Polish imprint got in contact with the band and asked for as much personal input as possible to make sure the end product was as good as it could be. They gave Solitude the opportunity to personally oversee the albums' remastering and also got John Perez to write liner notes.

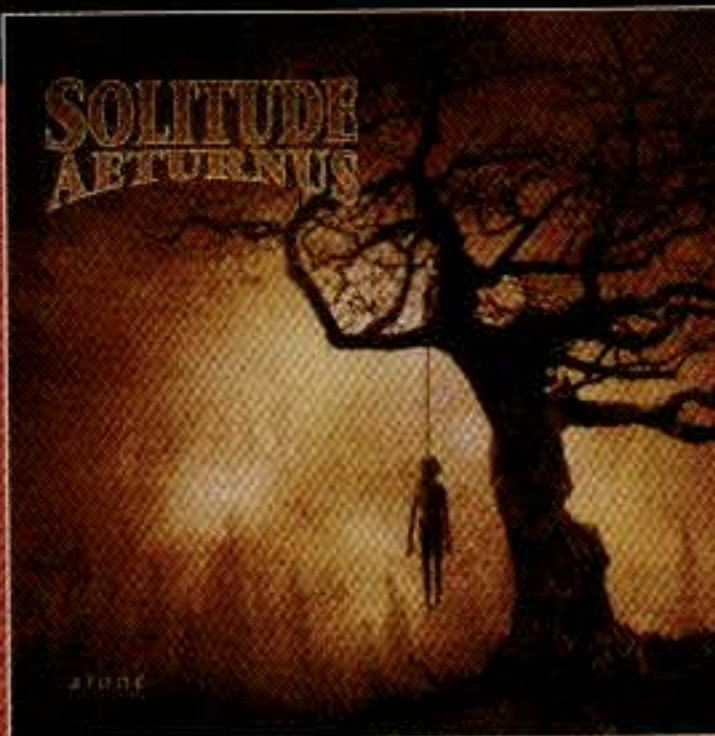
"When they asked to go ahead and do it, our only stipulation was for us, the band, to go and take care of the remastering," says Lowe. "Steve Moseley did the remastering, so we had total control. I'm pleased with them because it is more or less what we would have wanted them to sound like back in that time without actually changing the essence of the albums. They were a little thin so we beefed them up, which is what it called for."

"These reissues to me sound more true to what I think those records should have sounded like," Perez concurs, "and we didn't really do too much to them. All we did was give them a little bit more thickness and more bottom-end and take out some of that nasty that was present in a lot of that stuff. It did wonders for it, made it a little bit louder and that's it."

"The original mastering job given to those records in the early '90s — you've got to remember, digital media was brand new when those records came out — people didn't know how to master CDs properly at the time and you can hear it. A lot of those CDs from the late '80s and early '90s sound like shit. Play them next to an old record and you'll hear a dynamic difference that is unbelievable."

"I didn't know that back then, but as good as those records are, they lost something when they came out on CD and just weren't mastered properly — if they even mastered them at all. My guess is they probably did and they had a generic mastering process they would do to all of their albums and I think that's what happened. I seem to recall both those albums sounding a little better when we left the studio than what we got but I was still a little green back then and didn't know."

Working with Metal Mind on the reissues also opened up a dialogue between the band and label to also do something new. Obviously mutually pleased with the final outcome of the reissues of the Roadrunner-era albums, Metal Mind asked the band if they would be interested in traveling to Poland to shoot a live concert DVD, the first of their career.



**SOLITUDE AETERNUS Select Discography**  
*Mirror Of Sorrow* Demo — 1988, Self-Released  
*Into The Depths Of Sorrow* — 1990, Roadrunner  
*Beyond The Crimson Horizon* — 1992, Roadrunner  
*Through The Darkest Hour* — 1994, Pavement  
*Days Of Doom* VHS — 1994, Self-Released  
*The New Wave Of American True Metal Split w/ Iron Rainbow* — 1996, BPR  
*Downfall* — 1996, IRS  
*Adagio* — 1998, Massacre  
*Alone* — 2006, Massacre  
*Hour Of Despair* DVD — 2007, Metal Mind



"That was a no-brainer," says Perez. "Metal Mind contacted us about doing a DVD and said they'll pay for everything so why would we say no?"

"They have a reputation, they've already released some DVDs and we knew they were for real, so why not? It's kind of cool and exciting. We've never done a video before, period. It was cool to go over there and have a show shot. We've been asked for a professional live show for years by fans and I think it's something that Solitude fans will like."

The band traveled to Poland earlier this year for two shows, the second of which was filmed in Warsaw to become the newly released *Hour Of Despair*.

"The first night was actually just a warm up gig testing out the backline equipment," says Perez. "It was a fucking nightmare. We fly into Poland, no sleep, and we had to go and do the gig right off the plane. Testing the gear... I'm just trying to stand up! The gear was all fucked up, it didn't matter, the gear was going to be all fucked up the next day anyway. It was just a torture fest. We did that; it was a lot of fun. I'm not complaining — we had a fun gig in Krakow anyway."

"The next night we filmed the gig and that was it."

"It was very well done," says Lowe. "They had six or eight cameras on us for shooting. It's very well-produced for what it is and it will be a kick for the fans since you really have to go see us live to get the real essence of the music." "We mastered the music for it ourselves too, so it's good and heavy, but what I've seen of the footage looks really good."

With six full albums' worth of material to draw from for the DVD, the band whittled down their output to a dozen songs and made a decision to go with their own instincts for what to include in the set. It means that not a lot of older classics were included — only one song off their debut ("Destiny Falls To Ruin") made the set list — but the band does an absolutely spot-on job throughout, coming across like a band that tours nonstop, instead of the odd festival date they can actually work into their regular schedules.

"Honestly, it sounds kind of selfish," says Perez, "but we just chose songs we wanted. We figured we were promoting a new record, so we put a bunch of songs off there on it, but it was kind of random. We just picked songs we like and ones we thought would sound good live."

For many longtime fans, it may be the closest opportunity to see the band perform live anytime soon. As previously mentioned, the band doesn't get to play as many shows as they'd like to. With the current musical climate in North America, it doesn't make a lot of sense for the band to invest a lot of time touring Stateside. Plus, with Robert Lowe now committed to fronting Candlemass, a band that does tour regularly in Europe, you can expect the Solitude camp to be more selective with the shows they do. But don't think for a minute that this is a band about to go away.

John Perez will be releasing the previously mentioned *Concept Of God* project's full-length debut on Brainticket before the end of the year. Perez says the record is like a mixture of the classic Solitude sound mixed with '70s style rock à la Rainbow. He claims it's what he would expect Solitude Aeternus to sound like without his contributions.

Solitude Aeternus is already halfway through the writing process for their seventh album, which Perez expects they will begin recording within the next few months. The guitarist says this record may come as a shock to some longtime fans of the band, as he feels the time is right for a little shake up.

"It's going to be different," confides Perez. "We make every album sound different and I think at this point it's more important than ever. Six albums into our career, that's what I call the breaking point. Usually, your favorite band after four or five albums you don't really pay attention to their new releases. After an artist releases so many records, you get less and less interested in their newer output — sometimes because the artists aren't self-aware enough of what they are doing and continue to put out material that's too familiar."

"That being said, I'm going to make sure this next album is not too familiar. I'm going to get the fists in the air and probably put out some straight up heavy metal — about god-damned time. Steve's written three or four songs that are really good, very straight up metal songs. We'll keep some doom in it, of course, but we're gonna make sure it's quality before doom. [Laughs] I am gonna just get roasted for saying that!" [www.eternalsolitude.com]

