Vis Nox

Issue Two



Practical and Theoretical Occultism,
Original Poetry and Prose,
Interviews and Reviews

NIFLHEIM



Easily among the most interesting new bands from right here in Sydney are Niflheim, whose recently-released demo has been attracting considerable attention in this area of late. Presented here is an interview with band-member Skaði...

Before anything else, would you like to introduce Niflheim to us, and say something about the background of the band?

'Niflheim was initially formed in May 1995 and consists of two members, myself (vocals, guitar, bass) and Aegir (drums). We had previously played in a death metal band, but this was very insignificant. When it concluded, we decided to change the concept and conceive a totally different band, though my guitar style and tone have still remained the same. The main goal with Niflheim was to record the demo, regardless of whether or not we had a bass player.'

You recorded and released your first demo fairly recently; how was that experience? I understand that the decision for you to perform the vocals was a fairly recent one, so did that cause any last-minute problems as far as the recording was concerned?

'The recording of the demo went smoothly enough, though more time in the studio would have been useful. I had only commenced with the vocals two weeks prior to recording, but this did not cause any problems, as the vocals came quite naturally.'

How are things going sales-wise with the demo so far, and would you say there has been a good deal of interest? Are you looking to be signed at the moment, and if so, have you received any offers at this stage that you'd like to speak about?

'The demo has been selling rather well and we are almost out of tapes. We have had a fair amount of interest from several radio programmes and 'zines. There has been some label interest, one particularly in Norway which looks very promising. The feedback from people is very interesting, as they like or dislike different things about our music.'

Are there any bands who you feel have influenced your sound? Alternatively, whether or not they have influenced you, are there bands for whom you have a special admiration, for whatever reason?

'We listen to many bands and because of this, I find it difficult to say certain bands directly influenced our sound. Some of my particular favourites are Bathory, Immortal, Kreator, Iron Maiden, Black Sabbath, Megadeth, and early Celtic Frost. I also enjoy listening to classical music, especially Bach, Beethoven and Handel. I listen to a lot of black metal as well, like: Satyricon, Darkthrone, Mayhem, Emperor, Setherial, Impaled Nazarene, Dark Funeral, Dimmu Borgir, etc.'

There seems to be an opinion floating around that defines the female voice as a 'thing of beauty', and to some degree this seems to have influenced the way in which more than a few bands incorporate female vocals. While there is certainly something to be said for the purity of tone and melodic qualities displayed by some female vocalists, I also think it is great that there are a few, like yourself, who are using a harsher style. On the other hand, one thing I find a bit annoying is that some bands seem to use female vocals as a sort of 'optional extra' to add to the

atmosphere which might otherwise be lacking in their sound, rather than incorporating such vocals in a central position within their music. What's your opinion of the various views concerning the female voice?

'I do not have a strong negative or positive opinion about this, as I do not listen to a great number of bands that feature female vocals. When I chose to be the vocalist for Niflheim, I sang as far from femininity as possible. Some people who have heard the demo did not realise that they were listening to a female voice, and in a way, I am pleased. I think there is too much emphasis on the term of 'female vocalist' as I would much rather be considered 'a vocalist'.' *(A very legitimate comment, that last one. And I agree that if one did not know otherwise, it would be easy to mistake the demo's vocals simply because such a style is presently most often performed by males – ah, the dangers of making an assumption! TH)*



One thing I am somewhat curious about is the choice of your band-name. Have you experienced – or do you anticipate that you may experience – many problems because of the fact that there is another band of the same name? Along similar lines – when you came to choose the name, were you already aware that someone else had chosen it, but decided to take it for yourselves, regardless? Or was there some other particular reason for the choice?

'We have had several comments about the name, but we have not confronted any major problems. I chose 'Niflheim' because it suited our style of music and I liked its meaning, although Ásgarð would be more appropriate on the level of greatness on Yggdrasil. I was surprisingly unaware at the time that the name was already being used. When I did find out, I was adamant that we would keep the name, however if situations arise in the future that forces us to change, I have other alternatives ready.'



In witchcraft-based paganism and neo-paganism especially, there is a perception that god- and goddess-forms are, in a sense, 'universal property'. For those reasons some like to utilise god and goddess names from a number of different cultures within their rites. A more traditional individual, though, would most likely insist that the ways of their ancestral culture belong to them alone. Considering that you predominantly use Norse-inspired imagery within your music, in what way would you reply to someone who criticised you on that account?

'I don't really care what people think or say. I believe if a person is drawn to certain beliefs they are entitled to worship them. If ancestral heritage played such an important role, Scandinavian bands would focus on their true Teutonic religion, instead of Satanism, which is only a part of Christianity. I think bands can write about anything they may choose. I intensely detest people who criticise or try to dictate what a



person or band is supposed to express in their lyrics or image. We have only had one person really criticise our Norse inspirations. This person assumed that we would never be taken seriously and that we should stick to writing about the Australian way of life and how this inspires us!? I really find all this very amusing. I wish people would get on with their own lives, instead of sending petty, idiotic shit. We are not interested!'

Your own chosen name, Skaði, is an interesting one. In the myths she is certainly an example of independence – arming herself to war against the Aesir, and eventually returning to her country of mountains upon finding Njörð's lands dissatisfying. Was it for these, and/or other similar qualities – such as Skaði's reputation as a fierce huntress – that you took up her name?

'Most definitely. I felt that Skaði represented the true inner being. When she confronted the Aesir, to avenge her slain father (Thjazi), she was tricked into marrying Njörð. His home of light and sea (Nóatún) did not suit her usual dwelling of darkness, mountains and ice (Thrymheim). This contrasting union of Njörð and Skaði can be related to the water and ice aspect of Hvergelmir, the river which flows out of Niflheim. They soon parted and it was later revealed that it was Loki that had been responsible for the slaying of Thjazi. Loki was bound to three rocks on the same island where his wolf-son Fenrir was also bound, and Skaði hung a snake above his head. When the snake dripped burning venom onto him, he writhed in agony, causing terrible earthquakes across the land. Skaði is a Frost Giantess, but is considered one of the Vanir, due to her connection with Njörð. Along with what has already been mentioned, she is also associated with woodlands, victory, initiation, dark magic, winter and the Triple Goddess. She is also summoned to achieve a justly revenge on enemies. May I uphold her everlasting spirit!' *(I note that in the ninefold system of Norse 'elements', venom is listed as that which dissolves and breaks down form, among other things, and thus fits very neatly into the water and ice associations also mentioned. TH)*

One detail of your biography which caught my attention spoke of your definition of Niflheim as 'the lowest level of the nine realms (in Norse paganism.)' However, from my readings on the subject I think it is fair to say that such an idea is somewhat open to dispute, since a number of works on these subjects claim that Hel, named for its goddess-ruler, is in fact the lowest of the nine. Then again, I've also heard that if one considers the central plane of Yggdrasil (that is Midgard surrounded by Jotunheim, Muspellsheim, Vanaheim and Niflheim), then this should actually be viewed as a tilted disc, with Muspellsheim on the leading edge and Niflheim on the lower, so I was thinking perhaps this was what you are referring to?

'Yes, the horizontal world pattern simplifies Yggdrasil, with Niflheim being the traditional wasteland of immense ice and snow. Some sources state that Hel and Niflheim are the same, but then others say they are different but bordering very closely to one another. The beginning of the whole Norse cosmology has been suggested that Ginnungagap (The Great Void) had consisted of only two worlds. Niflheim, to the north and Múspell due south. When the ice and coldness of Niflheim met with Múspell's fiery realm, Ýmir was conceived. (Ýmir is the first giant and the start of the creations of the worlds and the gods.) I have also heard that Hel had many realms, with Niflheim being the worst and ultimate end. As described in verse: 'To Nine Worlds I came / To Niflhel beneath / Where the dead from Hel descend'.' *(In my most recent readings on the subject, a theory was proposed that the horizontal [quartered-circle] and axial [higher-middle-lower realm] systems were conceived of at different periods of history by the proto-Germanic peoples, but not ever fully reconciled with both therefore being considered potent and appropriate in different contexts. TH.)*

But again, I'm also familiar with the idea that perhaps there is more than a little in common between Hel and Niflheim, considering that the myths state that the goddess Hel held a large palace of some importance in Niflheim (though she was also said to have dwellings in all nine worlds, for that matter). Would you, then, tend to see this connection as valid, too?

'Yes, the goddess Hel had a mighty palace (Sleetcold) in Niflheim, some say that she is also the supreme ruler of Nifleim. She is one of three off-spring of Loki and Angrboða (the other two being Fenrir and the World Serpent) and is described as looking like half

a blackened corpse and the other half, of a beautiful woman. She welcomes souls that have failed to make the journey to Valhöll.'

Would it be correct, then, to say that in one sense your music could been seen as an act of dedication to the pagan gods and goddesses? And if that is the case, then I was wondering if you express that some devotion in other ways, such as within active rites of worship, or magical workings?

'Absolutely. Our new songs have many references to the deities, as I have written all the lyrics. I feel that putting my belief into the music is an act of rededication to the gods and goddesses. With magical workings, it is natural that I would show my devotion in other ways, but I never speak of my practices to anyone.'



So, what is likely to be next for Niflheim? I understand you have plans for another recording, sometime during the next year – has much been done, as yet, towards that goal? Or are you still waiting to see how things will turn out as far as your demo is concerned?

'We are currently rehearsing nine songs for a new up-coming CD that will be released early-mid '97. Some titles of the new material are: 'Chains of Eternal Bondage', 'Realms of Darkness and Freezing Fog', 'The Halls of Perpetual Desire'. We were originally planning to self-finance the CD, but as we have had label interest, circumstances may change. If we had not received any interest from anybody, we still would have done the CD regardless. We are also thinking of doing some rough video clips of maybe 'Frozen Solid' or 'Hammer of the North', but I feel that we should wait until the CD is released and do some songs off this as well.'

You mentioned that you're intending to improve some aspects of your sound on future recordings, in comparison to the demo; could you give a few details about these matters?

'We are fairly pleased with the demo, but I personally think that it would have been better if there was less bass, and vocals louder. The demo was mixed rather hastily, in which time was not taken to fully analyse the overall sound. With the next recording, we are going to spend more time to achieve a cleaner sound. Of course, we generally play our certain style and this will be evident in all our future recordings.'

Similarly, have you had any luck so far in finding a bass player? I see from your biography that you would like to play live if a suitable person can be found, so have you discovered anyone who seems promising at this point?

'We haven't looked for a bass player since the demo was recorded as we find that we can compose and play just as easily without one. We will probably commence the search for a bass player again in the near future, as we would like to play live. If we ever do play live, we intend to have an interesting stage show, which will take much planning and preparation.'

Finally, how would you like to end this interview?

'I gaze upon lands
Of once wise…
Wearing this leather,
I embrace mighty steel.
I stand tall, my beliefs.
I care not for any foes ways.

The winds of my pagan past
Blow through my lasting spirit.
I stand true throughout these days.
May I eternally dwell
In shadows of blackened mist.'

My gratitude is extended to Skaði, who (as you have read), performs the vocals, guitar and bass for Niflheim. These questions were answered by her in November, 1996. The bands contact-address may be found with all others at the conclusion of this issue.