DANI LLAMAS DON MARIANI THE SOULBREAKER COMPANY THE SURROYAL GLEN HANSARD THE THUNDERBEATS

"...we are ugly but we have the music".

ROCK BOTTOM MAGAZINE



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The Soulbreaker Company

Rock as a Vital Expression

Rock Bottom Magazine

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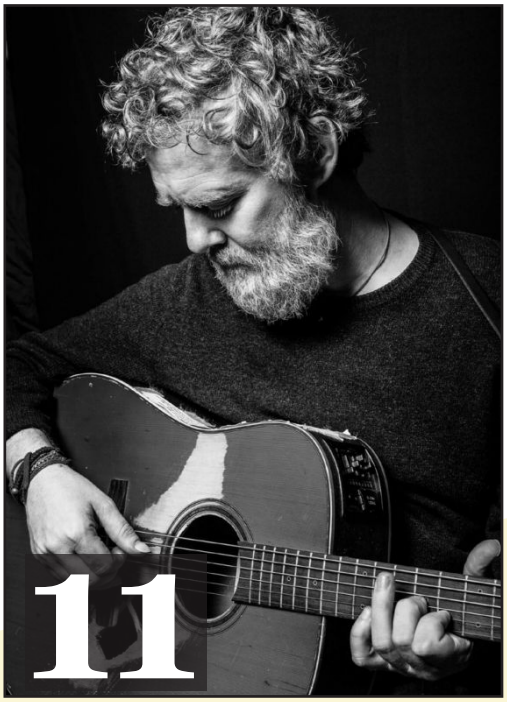
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Dani Llamas



Glen Hansard



Don Mariani



The Soulbreaker Company



The Surroyal



Editorial
by javistone

FIRST

KEEPING OUR OWN RHYTHM

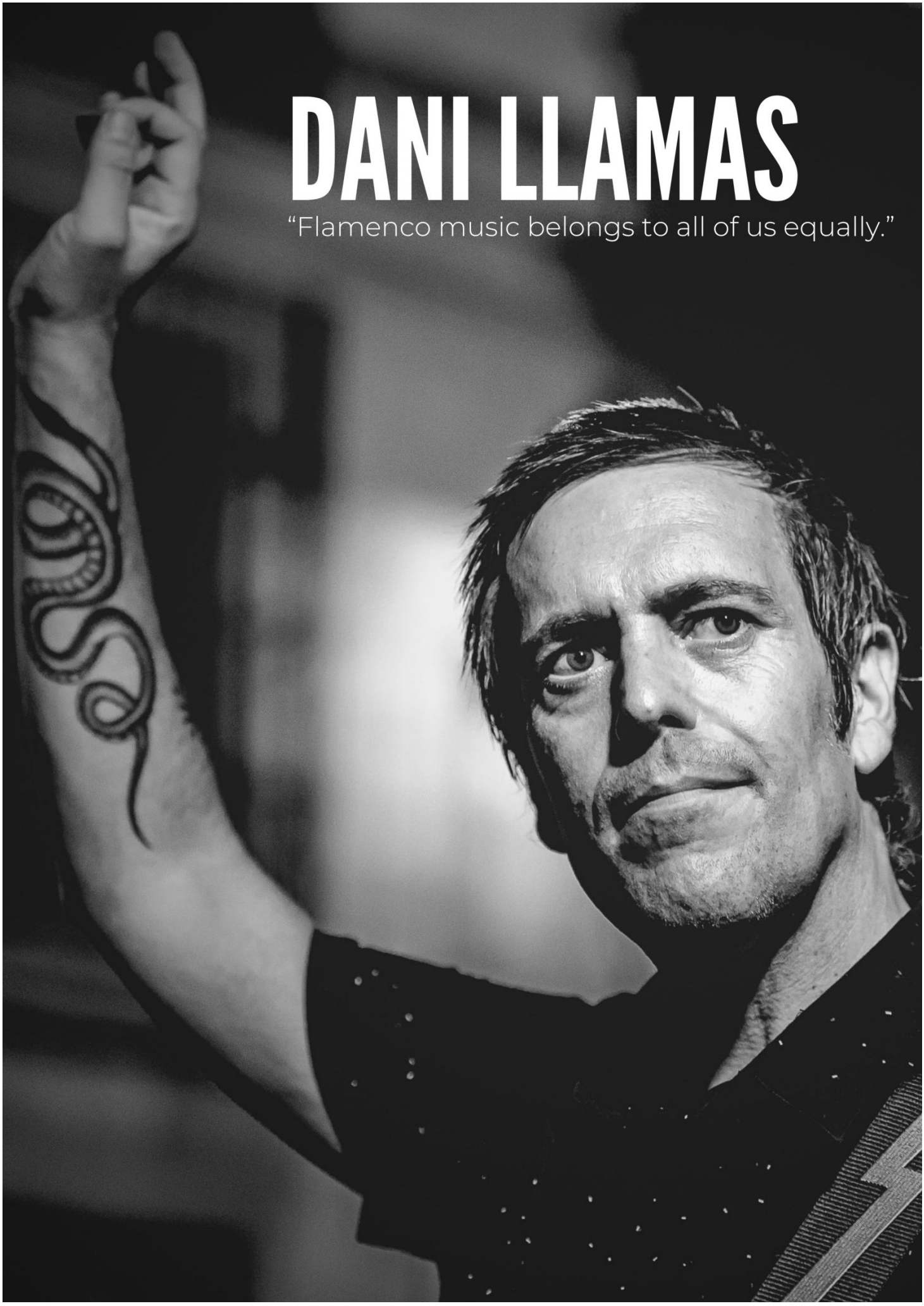
WE ARE A SMALL PORTHOLE

For the second year in a row, we are featuring a young band on our cover that we discovered thanks to the never-sufficiently-praised 6 Grupos 6 competition in Jerez. If last year the rocky hills of the Sierra de Ubrique enchanted us through the psychedelic explorations of Mientras las abejas duermen and we put them on the cover (by the way, the well-deserved winners of this year's edition), this time it is the Sevillian band The Surroyal, on the back cover, who join the Vitoria-based The Soulbreaker Company, a more than deserved cover after the release of another wonderful album, "Sins".

The fact that the competition in the city of Cádiz has brought together, year after year, for decades, a handful of young artists eager to show themselves and their music, their creations… is something worthy of admiration and joy for the writer, who would love to be twenty again to enjoy it in a way much more in keeping with the audience and the artists themselves. That is not the case, but in the absence of my own youth, I see it in abundance all around me on those days, from my daughter Natalia, who at eleven has already become a huge fan of the competition and joins her father for all three days it lasts, to the sheer number of young talents who understand music as something more than mere entertainment, more as a form of artistic expression, a natural impulse that you have to let yourself be carried away by. Beyond age, rock (and all its branches) is about that, feeling that energy and letting yourself be carried away by it. It is impressive to see so much attitude, so much talent and so much passion. The Surroyal are just one example of what is out there, waiting to be given a chance. Too many cookie-cutter festivals, too many line-ups manufactured by the same companies, business above everything else, music included, of course. And far too many empty or closed venues because the mainstream audience only understands tribute acts or festivals when it comes to enjoying live music, a genuine tragedy.

We have this new issue, number 53, and another Rock Bottom year is coming to an end, nine years have gone by and there will soon be a new yearbook. In other words, here we are, still doing our thing, maintaining our own biorhythm and trying to capture your attention so that, through these pages, digital or on paper, you can discover artists who surprise you and plenty of entertainment. But above all, we try to offer our own view of the world, one in which there are other possibilities and other options beyond those people try to sell you. Because there is more, much more, out there. We are just a small porthole through which to look at that other reality. Join us, you might be in for a surprise.

ATTITUDE, TALENT, PASSION


DANI LLAMAS
“Flamenco music belongs to all of us equally.”

"Well, I don't like flamenco at all, but I really like the album." And that's when you say: "Come on, great, Paco, we did it."

This interview with Dani Llamas was scheduled to take place two years ago, when the album "Sangre" (Wild Punk Records, 2023) was in the works. For health reasons, thankfully long forgotten now, it had to be postponed. It was only now, in 2026, while the Jerez native is putting the finishing touches to what will be his new release, that we met up with him at a kebab shop in Jerez, enjoying the cool air, to settle our unfinished business, take the pulse of where he is now and find out about his next moves.

We've seen you play punk, folk, power pop and, for the last few years, music with flamenco roots. Which of those styles feels most like you?

If you think about it, what I'm doing now brings all those styles together at the same time. I don't believe in styles, I just keep adding them together. There are styles I like that you haven't mentioned and that I also keep incorporating. In the end, it's the result of accidents and of what you accumulate along the way, we're gatherers, nomadic gatherers. At this age, you're not really in a position to shut yourself off, but rather to keep adding things, and honestly, I feel more comfortable now without having to stick to one particular style.

I've just asked you about yourself, about how you feel playing these styles. But how do you feel the audience responds to what you do? Is there a big difference beyond the styles themselves?

That's a very strange thing. What is true is that there's a major barrier that I used to have and no longer do, which is Spanish. Since you start writing in Spanish, you notice that there's much more response and acceptance, fewer obstacles, because people understand your lyrics. Before, something similar happened with English, especially with people in Spain, where you had to make an effort to understand you. But that direct response, being onstage and seeing people singing the songs at the top of their lungs… it's something I missed out on for more than twenty years. And now, suddenly, hey, it's great. And it's also true that I get better gigs, under better conditions, and I play more interesting styles since I started doing it in Spanish and since I started this more personal project. It's not a preference or anything, it's a fact. I think there's a big difference, a leap, between what I used to do and what I'm doing now.

Being from Jerez, have you noticed any reluctance or criticism here in your hometown, in the land of flamenco?

Not really… Nobody is a prophet in Jerez, except Los Delincuentes. And maybe not even that much: perhaps they do better in Madrid than they do here. Not even flamenco artists: flamenco artists are hated here. Nobody is a prophet in Jerez, nobody. But, point one: I don't care who says what; I'm not a boat that's going to rock because someone says no. And point two: I know what I'm talking about here, because I've been talking about flamenco a lot lately and with knowledge of the subject, and I can defend it against anyone, without lawyers. Flamenco is a musical genre that belongs to all of us equally. Musical genres are universal. Folklore isn't: folklore is tied to nationalism, to localism. But flamenco is a musical genre. In fact, it was one of the first to be recorded in history, long before jazz; jazz dates from the late nineteenth century. And as a musical genre, and as a business, it belongs to everyone. The heritage thing? We can discuss that, that's already political exploitation. But come on, it's like saying jazz is the heritage of the people of New Orleans. Are you going to take ownership away from someone from New York, or an African person, or a European? I don't care: genres are international. Here, flamenco belongs to all of us and we all have the right to get our hands on it and do whatever we want with it, because that's what it means for it to be part of the heritage of humanity. So I don't really care what they say, whether it's about punk, flamenco, anything.

The question had two sides: one about flamenco and another about the institutional side. For example, Perra Blanco was given an award recently, in April, in La Línea. She accepted it and then spoke out onstage against her city, which apparently ignores her quite a lot.

I think… folks: do you really think there is any institution in Jerez, in the city or in the Junta de Andalucía, at any level, that genuinely puts the defence of its cultural heritage above everything else? That's not true. Look, I'm a worker, a nobody. But think, for example, of a Jerez painter like González Ragel, that guy who only painted skeletons. Do you know that Ragel's entire legacy is in an apartment in La Plata? We're not even going to put on an exhibition at the town hall, set up a major gallery, organise a major event to introduce people to one of the great figures of our heritage. Neither the Junta de Andalucía nor anyone else. On top of that, the cultural model of Jerez city council is the one used by the Spanish right: models based on a different kind of culture, not mass culture or festival culture. I was always against the whole idea of Jerez becoming a Capital of Culture, because I thought it was a joke. To be a capital of culture, you need to have a cultural model. It's not about criticising or distancing myself from my hometown: I just think it's a joke. I don't think this city has any kind of cultural model, or that culture is something important to the people in charge here. For them, what matters is events, because that brings a lot of money into Jerez. Not what Jerez can contribute to the world, which is indescribable. If you study how many names Jerez has contributed to culture, especially music, per capita it could be one of the places with the highest number in the world. But because we don't want to see that, what matters to us is that this leaves money in four bars. And, of course, not for the waiters.



It's a can of worms that could be opened and discussed at length.

It doesn't keep you awake at night.
No, not at all. I'm not made for that. I've always thought you had to play outside here.

The next question goes in that direction: you've played at the Seville Biennial, and here in Jerez… have you had anything? The Jerez Festival?
No, I've never played at the Jerez Festival. I don't even know if… anyway. I don't expect anything from any of them, I mean the events. It's true that the Seville Biennial, especially in the past, when Chema Blanco was at the helm, had something… Of course, it depends on how you define flamenco. In my case, I consider it a musical genre in which many things can fit: you can experiment and mix it with other genres. I've done the whole routine. That means mixing it with Latin music, sometimes badly, even. Or what Niña Pastori does, or what Perrate does with Za!, or what Califato does, or what I do, it doesn't matter. That's flamenco too. But I also think it's extremely important for people to know that pure, deep flamenco, whatever we want to call it, needs to be preserved. And the peña circuit, all of that, from what I've been able to see lately now that I've been spending more time in Jerez, works wonderfully. The peñas are packed, there are good performances, it's being looked after. And as I say one thing, I'll say another: I think there's room for everything here, and we have to go after all of it.

Very well. Speaking of genres, what similarities do you see between punk and flamenco, for example?
It's very simple. I've always looked for very direct music. I've never liked progressive rock, songs longer than four minutes with embellishments; they have to be very well justified. Sometimes it's just onanism, some guy in a workshop playing a solo. I've never liked solos, except when they replace a verse or a chorus. For me, music is about synthesising emotions, it has to be direct. Root music all is. I find more and more similarities between blues and flamenco; they are incredibly similar things. And punk, really, is about synthesising rock and roll: all of rock and roll condensed into a minute and a half, two minutes at most. Something direct, without embellishments, that has to punch you in the face. Flamenco has to punch you in the face or give you a "mojá": it gives you a "mojá" in the ribs and… "son of a bitch, it hurts, but I like it". Punk is exactly the same: it has to hurt and it has to move you, quickly. It isn't a development that unfolds little by little, it isn't a symphony that you discover gradually. There are no seven-and-a-half-minute flamenco songs… well, there are, but what matters is the singing. You start with the guitar falseta and in the end you say: a set of seguiriyas can be seven minutes, but the message is condensed.

That's somewhat along the same lines. Punk has many messages: in the British era, unemployed people…
…expressed their anger, let's say. With flamenco, something similar. Flamenco is very much the music of the dispossessed. Above all, they share a social origin: both have been conceived from within the working class, by people on the outside, people who have no resources. It's very difficult to find flamenco made from within the bourgeoisie. There is one unusual example, Silverio Franconetti, but he is a different kind of figure, an important one, one of the originals. Most flamenco is practised by poor, dispossessed, humble people with no resources. And so, that message of poverty, precariousness, the margins and marginalisation finds its way into the entire lyrical imagery. Even in romantic relationships you can see that world, a world belonging to the popular classes. Punk shares, in theory, that same origin: unemployed kids, perhaps more closely associated with youth. Then it's true that musical genres, the business, market niches… In the end, you can consider Green Day or Blink-182 punk, when they are kids who haven't really experienced much marginalisation: white, American, middle-class. That has also made me think that we need to separate the wheat from the chaff.

The question is whether you believe in the power of the message in such dark times.
If you tell me: "Choose between the Ramones or the Clash"… The Ramones are a wonderful



thing, but I will always choose the Clash because of that extra bit, that extra 0.5. I will always choose music that is also used to try to achieve something. Music, in the end, is transversal: if you put a message through music, which is a transversal channel, you have more options than by giving a political rally. Do I think it still has power? More than ever. The times ahead are dark, the enemy is incredibly strong. You tell me: what do we do? Do we start talking about nonsense? At least let's use the means we have, which are becoming fewer and fewer. We have to use music, of course. But beyond the lyrics, because it's very easy to make a propagandistic message, music is a cultural engine. It isn't just music: it's networks, it's concerts, it's pricing policies, it's the way our movement operates. It's a cultural movement, and it also has to convey certain values. I was always brought up with that in mind, because I come from hardcore, and hardcore hasn't just been music, but music associated with a movement that shares certain gatherings, an ethic. It isn't just the lyrics you write, that's very easy. It goes together with how we work with music, how we deal with the things we talk about at concerts, how we operate. I like that too.

I wrote this interview when your album "Sangre" had just come out.
Now I've got blood to spare.

As for transfusions, then... At that time the question was: you recorded the first two albums of your "flamenco period" with Rafa Camisón, and the third one was with Paco Loco. How was that change, that experience?
The thing is, recording with Paco Loco is very different. Look, I always advise people: when you have the album really worked out, really clear in your head, you go to a studio where you have a clear idea of the production and you don't need the figure of a traditional producer. But when you haven't worked the songs out much, when it's more like "I've got the sketch, but not the finished work", and you want that final push, to take it outside your own vision… The first two albums were "my vision is this, and this, and this". But I had already made those two, so I needed an outside perspective. And not just anyone's, but someone who likes flamenco somewhere between zero and nothing: that's Paco Loco. "I don't like flamenco, man, I don't like it at all, I don't understand it." So he comes along and brings you all that madness he has. You say yes and he says no, like the Beatles song. And at the end of the album, the guy tells you: "Well, I don't like flamenco at all, but I really like the album." And that's when you say: "Come on, great, Paco, we did it." He gave it a really strange vibe, and I think that's why it's so cool, because it's a very different approach.

And for the new album you've gone back to Rafa.
Yes, this album goes even further. There is a first side that we can say has a flamenco engine, where any expert will say "That's Molina's change in the seguiriya!", but it's all packed inside a capsule that you hear as a pop-rock song. You're listening to something that sounds like power pop, an anthem, and suddenly "I am Chacón's caracoles". It's taking the game a little too far. And of course, it's an album that needed a very clear, very unexperimental sound, because I already had everything in my head. Besides, it's an album we've worked on a lot, for the first time all of us as a band. El Ala Rota is a band, my band since I started making these albums; it has become established with Mateos, Marco, Rafa, Koe... I wanted to make an album with the band, as if we were rehearsing: we would go to the rehearsal room, I would bring the ideas, but we would put them together among all of us. It had to be that way. And then we took it into the studio.

That was another question: what do you ask of the band, of the people who play with you?
They're really funny. When I tell them, "Mate, the soleá, the soleá note", they answer: "You've got to be kidding me, I don't know what the soleá note is." What do I ask of them? Nothing, man. Absolute freedom. I don't give them any kind of guidelines. There are certain things to take into account, but in my case they don't really apply, because flamenco singers are very difficult to fit to a tempo. Here there are four beats, here

there are three… it's impossible, you have to follow them. In the end, I adapt my singing to certain patterns, and that makes it easier for them. For me, the human element matters much more than the technical or virtuoso side. I don't want five virtuosos who can't even stand the sight of each other. We have a very good group of people, we get along really well.

Speaking of collaborations, there's La Tremendita, Rocío Márquez, Raúl Cantizano on guitar… I imagine the new album will also have guests.
Yes, the new one is a collaborative album. There's Soleá Morente, Julio de la Rosa, Fajardo, Seroka from Califato, Paul Lazare, Pilar Angulo…

And if you could bring someone back from the grave to collaborate with you?
For me, as far as singers go, there are quite a few. Although, come on, none of them would want to collaborate with me; they'd say I'm completely nuts. Morente, I think Morente would be quite up for it. But I don't know, from the old days I'd bring back Tía Anica la Piriñaca; I'd make Tía Anica sing something with me whether she wanted to or not, because I absolutely adore her. That's where the circle closes.

Let's see, while we're at it. Do you play any old songs in your live set?
Do you mean old songs in English? No. This is a new project, there's been a change. I never sing anything in English. Except once in Dublin: I did the entire set in Spanish and then three songs in English from the previous albums at the end. That's the only time. Nobody asks me for them, they don't come naturally to me, and they don't to the band either. People come to hear this. There's been a change in the audience, a whole load of new people.

You've collaborated with Joey Cape, Tim Armstrong, Grant Hart… Of all of them, who impressed you the most or surprised you in some way?
Look, without really meaning to, I've collaborated with a huge number of people, I've met a lot of people. And this is something I still can't explain to myself. I'm from here, from Jerez de la Frontera, I grew up in Los Naranjos, I went to Alfonso X El Sabio, a state school, then Coloma… I'm someone who doesn't feel part of the world of stars at all. And yet, for some reason, many of the people who were my heroes when I was young have gradually become fans of what I do: some are friends, others are even fans. Others are people I talk to on the phone for two hours. I find that very difficult to take in. Whether it's Joey, Propagandhi, Grant Hart, Mac from Superchunk, Greg Dulli, Alan Sparhawk from Low, Norman Blake from Teenage Fanclub… names that are part of my life, so many people. And, above all, the craziest one is Tim Armstrong: I'm a fan of Operation Ivy and Rancid, and suddenly the director cuts and there I am, sitting on the sofa in my house, playing all the Operation Ivy and Rancid songs on my crappy guitar. But it's true that we must have done something right to get to the five degrees of separation. We must have done something well. In my case, the five degrees of separation are one or none. It's a very curious thing that has happened to me with music. Of all the people I've met, the most impressive is Grant Hart, by far the greatest artist I've ever met. There's no comparison. And Tim Armstrong was incredible because we also recorded an album with Paco Loco. I toured with Grant, we did lots of projects together, and eventually we made it happen and did something together. The tour with Grant Hart is another story in itself. I should write all this down: between what has happened to me and what people have told me, it could make a good story.

Rafa, Pablo and Paco (GAS Drummers), what can you tell me about them?
That's already… it's something that just keeps growing, a very big story. The band is better than ever, because we've never had any serious problems. You know that bands split up over money these days. We're not in it for the money, we didn't get into this for that and we've never done terribly badly. No "my lawyers", plural, no law firms. Rafa, I'm actually going to the studio now to see him for a moment. Paco, I spoke to him this morning; Pablo, yesterday. It's not about rehearsing, they're not formalities; I'm talking about personal things. That's the answer: these people are family, they're there whenever you have a problem, everyone pulls together. It's a privilege.

How many years have you been together as a band?
We formed in '98, so in two years we'll have been together for thirty years. Now we're waiting to see if the city council gives us something through the circuit that's worthy of us. (Laughs)

Or the bullring.
The bullring, man. The fucking bullring. That's what I want, the bullring. I won't settle for anything less. Thirty years.

The Dani Llamas That Is Yet to Come.
I don't know, man. Rather than focusing on the guy who negotiates with lots of people, I see myself above all as someone who has somehow been reborn. I had a serious health problem, I saw myself more out than in, you know? One foot out the door, the pine box and all that. But something happened to me: I couldn't write. And I'm a songwriter, a working man. But for two years I couldn't. Blocked, but really badly. And when my problem was resolved, luckily there was a solution, it was a transplant, a replacement therapy, and now I just have to go for check-ups, I take a few little pills and it's going very well, I'm very healthy… at that moment, when I came back from the hospital, everything became unblocked. I made the new album, well, I wrote about twenty-four songs in ten days. I chose eleven from all of them: some things came out more in the copla vein, others much more rock-oriented, others kind of punky… and in the end I chose the eleven that I think are the best. There's a first side that draws on flamenco, where you can recognise something, and another part that doesn't draw on it at all, but is sung in Andalusian, sung in my own voice. And I think it sounds more like Dani Llamas than ever. We hope it will be released in 2027.

Juan Carlos León



Glen Hansard (1970-2026)



One of Our Own

I was never Glen Hansard's number-one fan, but ever since I saw "The Commitments" I have followed his career as if it were that of a friend you haven't seen in a long time, but whose success still makes you happy. Every time I have turned to his music, I have found it comforting, and his death in a motorcycle accident has been particularly hard. Jennifer Finch was not someone I followed very closely either, but her passing at just fifty-eight from an aggressive brain cancer has also been a hard blow. Today we woke up to the tragic news of Dolly Parton's death, but she leaves us after eight decades of a life lived to the fullest. Both Hansard and Finch were, for everyone in my generation… among our own, which is why it hurts so much.

Hansard was born in Ballymun, Dublin, in 1970 and, while still a teenager, began playing in the streets, the famous "busking", which made his music direct and close to the people. In 1990 he founded The Frames, a fundamental band in Irish rock over the past few decades, and in 1991 he had his first taste of popularity playing Outspan Foster, the guitarist in the band at the center of Alan Parker's "The Commitments" (1991). However, his name gained real prominence thanks to John Carney's "Once" (2007), in which Hansard acted alongside Czech singer and pianist Markéta Irglová. In the film, the two played two anonymous musicians from Dublin who found in their songs a way to communicate (if you have lived in Dublin, you will relate). "Falling Slowly", written and performed by both of them, went on to win the Oscar for Best Original Song in 2008. Markéta and Hansard became a couple and formed the project The Swell Season, which they put on hold after their breakup, with the Irish musician then embarking on his own solo career.

On July 28, 2026, at the age of 56, Hansard lost his life as he was leaving an Irish pub where he had been playing a few songs, guitar in hand, surrounded by friends. There is, in fact, a YouTube video of him performing "Tried and Failed", an unreleased song with a line that seems almost prophetic: "Time is the only thing that's going to fix this now" (impossible to hold back the tears. Vol. 1). His funeral was held on August 4 at St. Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin, and it was one of those funerals that send chills down your spine. Our dear Juan Carlos León, an expert in musical funerals (don't ask why), has written a formidable article about the event, which you can read at www.carleso.com and which I highly recommend. Eddie Vedder, Bono, The Edge, Imelda May, Markéta and dozens of others turned a painful farewell into a celebration of life and love for music, something truly moving. You can watch it in numerous YouTube videos (impossible to hold back the tears. Vol. 2), with Liam Ó Maonlaí (leader of my beloved Hothouse Flowers) serving as master of ceremonies at the piano. The religious service seemed as though it would never end, such was the intensity that filled the Dublin cathedral, with music flowing as a catharsis for the grief, a grief that was evident on the faces of everyone in attendance. To top it all off, everyone sang "Forever Young", by Bob Dylan, and yet the music emerged once again, spontaneously, as everyone in attendance began singing "The Auld Triangle", the famous Irish folk song, as the coffin was carried out (impossible to hold back the tears. Vol. 3). This farewell is proof of several things: that Hansard was loved by many people; that his music moved many people for decades; and, above all, it demonstrated something we all know very well by now: music is life. That is why people like Hansard, Finch and Parton are eternal.

Javistone

Guitars, Melodies and a Life Devoted to Power Pop

Dom Mariani

"It's no secret that I'm a huge fan of blues and psychedelic rock. Discovering The Beatles and Creedence Clearwater Revival when I was younger, it's music that inspired me from the age of 14 and onwards. Bands like Deep Purple, Led Zeppelin, T. Rex, Jimi Hendrix, even Foghat and Black Sabbath were playing on the radio, and as a young guitarist, I was drawn to these bands."

Dom Mariani (Fremantle, Australia, 1958) is one of the great musicians of our time. Guitarist, singer and, above all, songwriter of great songs, this son of Italian immigrants has spent more than 40 years delighting us with generous doses of pop melodies wrapped in vibrant riffs, paying homage to the rawest garage rock of the 1960s, whether with any of his bands (The Stems, DM3, Datura4) or as a solo artist. An impeccable career that deserves to be told, and we are lucky enough to be able to do so through the words of its protagonist himself, with whom we talked at length.

Green Stems and Blue Violets (1983-1987)

After several attempts to establish himself with a band, Mariani formed The Stems in 1983 with Richard Lane, Gary Chambers and John Shuttleworth, a pioneering band in the power pop movement, which was developing in the city of Perth at the time. "It was a very thriving scene that mainly favoured cover bands", Mariani himself tells us. "There were many pubs and clubs with bands playing, but the original scene, or rather, the number of venues that had bands playing their own material was relatively small. The Stems and other bands emerged through that scene. We managed to build a large following during that period. It wasn't easy, but we managed to change the direction things were going in, and the dominance of cover bands ceased to be such a thing



for a few years. Unfortunately, the scene that exists today seems to have returned to cover bands and tribute acts. There is a small scene of bands doing their own thing and thriving in their niche, especially within the punk scene".

The band played their first concert in 1984, opening for none other than The Saints, the legendary Brisbane punk band. "We were pretty lucky to get that gig. We had never seen the Saints before, but we were fans and it may have been their first visit to Perth, and I remember Chris Bailey was the only original member at the time. I think we made a good impression because the next show we played was packed". Thus, while the band's live reputation continued to grow, they managed to release a single on Citadel Records ("Make You Mine"), and travelled to Sydney to promote it, where they caught the attention of Rob Younger (Radio Birdman, The New Christs). "We met Rob when we moved to Sydney for a short time. We had already released our first single with Citadel Records and we knew they had a relationship with him, and they suggested that if we were going to record something new, we should ask him to produce it. This led us to work with him on the single "Tears Me in Two" and the EP "Love Will Grow".

The EP reached number 72 on the Australian charts and the band prepared for their first tour of the country (1986), as well as for the recording of their first full-length album, after signing with Mushroom Records. "At First Sight (At First Sight, Violets Are Blue)" was released in May 1987, becoming the third-best-selling independent album in Australia that year. Its first single, "At First Sight", was included on the soundtrack of the hit comedy "Young Einstein", and a subsequent single, "Sad Girl", was performed live on the Australian television programme "Countdown", hosted by Kylie Minogue. In short, The Stems were on the starting grid for a major breakthrough, but, nevertheless, on 31 August of that same year, the band played their final concert. "It seems incredible now, but we had everything going for us. We had worked hard for four years to gain popularity and respect, and now we were successful. We were on a good run and the future looked promising. However, cracks were beginning to appear. Signing with Mushroom meant that we were put in the spotlight, and the touring commitment became more demanding. We also made some big mistakes. Appointing a terrible manager was, in my opinion, the biggest mistake. Until then, we were happy living this independent and relaxed band life, but things started to change when we achieved mainstream success, and this put pressure on all of us. I was also having problems with the manager and Richard Lane and felt that I was losing control of the band I had founded, so I made the decision to leave. I was happy for the band to continue without me, but the others decided to walk away".

Preparing for the Future (1987-1991)

By the time Dom left The Stems, he had already recorded "It's My Time" with The Someloves, a side project formed together with Darryl Mather and his former bandmate Gary Chambers, with a sound much closer to alternative rock and baroque pop than The Stems, moving away from the punk speed of their early days, although without losing our protagonist's incredible ability to craft quality songs.

After leaving The Stems for good, they returned to that project, recording a new single ("Know You Now") and preparing a live set. Despite their initial reluctance, The Someloves entered the studio in 1990 to record their only studio album, "Something or Other", produced by Mariani and Mather together with Mitch Easter. The album went straight into the top 100 of the Australian charts and both the album and the band won awards at that year's West Australian Music Awards. But, once again, just when everything seemed to be going their way, it all fell apart. The Someloves was a side project that emerged while The Stems were living in Sydney, and it is quite possible that there would never have been a Someloves album if The Stems had not split up. Basically, it was a case of a contractual obligation to Mushroom Records on the one hand and the fact that, towards the end of The Stems, Darryl Mather and I had started recording a second single, "Know You Now". I suggested the idea of releasing the Someloves single to Mushroom and they agreed. That was when we got together with Mitch Easter. I wasn't in a good emotional place after the split with The Stems, but with Darryl insisting, I agreed to make an album. It was my first visit to the United States and the prospect of working with Mitch again was an exciting one. Unfortunately, The Someloves were short-lived. I think we were both at odds over what The Someloves were going to do. Mushroom wanted us to tour and we wanted to remain a studio project. There was talk of a second album, but I was no longer interested. Darryl and I went our separate ways, and I formed DM3".

Blessed Nineties (1992-1999)

In 1992, Dom Mariani shaped what was perhaps his most personal project to date. Although, creatively, he had always been the driving force behind both The Stems and The Someloves, in DM3 Dom was the only boss. With two first-rate lieutenants such as Toni Italiano and Pascal Bartolone on bass and drums, Dom once again felt free to unleash his full potential. Above all, onstage, something he had really missed with The Someloves. Lyrically, too, he showed a maturity compared to his other projects, avoiding easy clichés and tackling much more complex themes and compositions.

Musically, DM3 did not stray from the foundations of the early power pop that had always accompanied the Australian artist, but this time the shift towards the alternative rock that had been glimpsed in The Someloves became the dominant trend, although with much more powerful and rhythmic riffs. The band released their first album in September 1993 ("One Time, Two Times, Three Red Light"), once again with Citadel, and it would soon become one of the great gems of the alternative rock scene of the era. For me, that album stands shoulder to shoulder with genre classics such as "Copper Blue" by Sugar or "Green" by R.E.M., and lays the foundations for what would happen shortly afterwards with albums such as the debuts by Foo Fighters or Weezer. Songs such as "Like This", "Foolish", "180º" or "1 Time, 2 Times Devastated" are, without a doubt, timeless anthems of the best alternative rock of the 1990s. "Thank you! I have a lot of affection for the album and I think it was a great step forward for me. I was at the best point in my life, and I had also started playing live again with a new band. There was a real buzz around DM3, and it was a prolific time for writing new songs. I think the album captures that rawness and excitement of a new band".

After that release, the band embarked on a tour that would take them to major European festivals, such as the legendary Roskilde in 1994, whose performance was recorded for what became the album "DM3 Live (Roskilde Festival 1994)", released in May 2013. In every line-up Dom Mariani has been part of, the energy of his live performances has always been a defining feature, something that also stands out in his discography. "I enjoy live albums, but I don't always enjoy listening to my own performance, especially not soon after a concert. The memories are too recent, so I prefer to give them some space and appreciate them without judging them too much. There are a couple of live Stems albums, in case you haven't heard them. 'Weed Out', from a concert recorded in 1986, and more recently, we released a vinyl LP of a concert from 2017. As far as I know, both are available on streaming platforms".

The second DM3 album, "Road to Rome", released in June 1996, represented another step forward in Dom Mariani's career, a record this time conceived for mass success, with a much more ambitious production and extraordinarily mature songs that lost none of their freshness or bite. "I agree with that. I was encouraged by the positive response to the first album. It had done well and the band was on a roll, and I wanted the second album to be stronger than the first. I had been through a good period and felt I had the songs to make a good record. My goal was to make 'Road to Rome' the best album I could make".

It was such a success that the American journalist specialising in power pop ranked the album at number 11 on his list of the 200 best records in the genre, describing it as "a blend of the punch of the 90s and the melodies of the 60s". In 1997, the band embarked on a US tour and the label Bomp! Records released a compilation in the USA called "Dig It the Most", putting the band in the spotlight. In 1998, "Rippled Soul", DM3's third album, was released, and the band would eventually split up a year later, having forged a short but fruitful history within Australian power pop.

Entering the 21st Century (2000-2011)

After leaving DM3, Dom Mariani joined The Stoneage Hearts as guitarist, replacing Danny McDonald, which gave him the opportunity to return to touring and record "Guilty as Sin" with them in 2004. Perhaps that work as a guitarist was what encouraged him to form Dom Mariani & The Majestic Kelp in 2003, together with

Robbie Scorer (ex-Go-Starts), Killian Albrecht and Stu Loasby, where he surprised everyone with his stylistic shift towards instrumental surf music, while giving free rein to his skills as a guitarist. “It was an item on my bucket list. I’m a big fan of guitar and surf instrumentals, movie soundtracks and lounge music, so I was always going to do something like The Majestic Kelp. It’s another part of my musical influences as a guitarist, an extension of my style and my appreciation of those sounds. The initial idea was to bring together all those instrumentals I had written over time and put them on an album. At first it was going to be a surf guitar record, but it became more than that, and The Majestic Kelp, in turn, became an ongoing project that would go on to record four albums. The first two albums have their moments, the second being representative of the live band I formed around it, but the last two, “Tun Up the Sun” and “Hi-Seas”, found their own identity, and I’m especially proud of them”. The Majestic Kelp made their debut with “Underwater Casino” in 2005, the year our protagonist was inducted into the Australian Music Hall of Fame, and toured Europe and Japan under the name The Rippled Souls, opening for Teenage Fanclub and John Fogerty.

At the same time, he released his first solo album, “Homespun Blues & Greens”, a record primarily focused on pop which probably went much more unnoticed than it deserved. “It was my first solo album and it came shortly after DM3 put the whole thing aside. I think it’s a good record. I started recording for the album around the same time and it took me a few years to finish it. At that point I was too focused on the second Majestic Kelp album, and I didn’t do any promotion for it, so it went unnoticed. It was reissued on vinyl a few years ago”.

And in 2007, the surprise arrived: The Stems announced a reunion and a new album, proving that boredom is not an option in Dom Mariani’s life. “I try to avoid boredom, but it’s not as though I’m always looking for new things to do. I have other interests, but a Stems reunion was something I never would have imagined given the history of the split. I suppose time heals wounds and, for the most part, the problems we had were left in the past. What’s great is that it seems we have remained in the minds of our old fans, and now we’re seeing a new and younger generation of fans appreciating the band. In many ways, I think we’re playing better than we did the first time around, who would have thought. We released a second album, “Heads Up”, in 2007 and we’re now working on a new one”.

I Do What I Want (2011-present)

With the change of decade, Dom Mariani reactivated DM3 with several tours, both around Australia and abroad, and in September 2012 “Super Real” appeared, released under the name The DomNicks, together with Nick Sheppard, which critics described as “power pop with soul. They bring together the brightest pop of the 60s with the rawest blues. Add a shared love of soul, and you have the recipe for a classic”. But, without a doubt, the definitive change of direction came in 2015 with the release of “Demon Blues”, a blend of blues rock, boogie and psychedelic touches presented to us as Datura4. “It may seem that Datura4 is outside my comfort zone, but this is music that has been with me since the moment I picked up a guitar, so it’s a style I’ve always liked, which is why it comes naturally to me. It’s no secret that I’m a big fan of blues and psychedelic rock. Like discovering The Beatles and Creedence Clearwater Revival when I was younger, it’s music that inspired me from the age of 14 onwards. Bands like Deep Purple, Led Zeppelin, T. Rex, Jimi Hendrix, even Foghat and Black Sabbath were playing on the radio, and as a young guitarist, I was drawn to these bands. It was the new wave of what was happening musically in the mid-seventies. From there I discovered bands like Cream, Canned Heat, Ten Years After and a whole host of great Australian bands that eventually led me to the blues greats. I grew up in a time when music was always changing. Punk rock also had an influence. There were so many great artists to appreciate. Most fans know me for my guitar pop output and there’s no denying that it’s a big part of my musical style, but blues and hard rock are also there as influences, and it depends on how you use them, however subtle they may be, to achieve the desired effect. I think it helps create the best rock and roll. Too often, bands that cling to a purist belief just make the music one-dimensional. I can honestly say that Datura4 has been both liberating and satisfying for me. I wanted to return to those early influences and have fun, play live, write songs and perhaps make an album. We’re already six albums in, with the latest being “High on the Low Brow”, and I’m still enjoying it”.

Last year, Dom Mariani released his second solo album, “Apple of Life”, a record with a great deal of intimacy and introspection that was one of the albums of 2025. “I suppose that after all the Datura4 and Majestic Kelp albums, and the countless Stems tours, I felt the need to make another pop album. It was just a matter of finding the time to do it. In fact, it took me a couple of years to complete it, but I was glad I did. Since The Stems, The Someloves, DM3 and my first solo album, I’ve been trying to make the best pop album possible, and the time away from that pursuit gave me the opportunity to create a new batch of songs that were personal, introspective and reflected where I am in my life”.

The album was supposed to be presented live in our country in the spring, but the war in Iran made it impossible to fly from Australia, which cancelled not only this tour but also other tours by Australian bands in Europe, something that, of course, has not gone unnoticed by Dom Mariani. “It’s a total disaster! I try to stay positive about things, but I feel that the world is in a really bad place right now. It’s crazy, and I find it hard to understand why these things are happening when I’ve always believed in right and wrong. This current gallery of political clowns is determined to push us towards disaster”.

When we conducted this interview, Datura4 had just released their seventh album, “High on the Low Brow”, where the songs still sound as fresh and exciting as they did on the first day. That’s why, before finishing the interview, I emphasise that creativity and freshness that continues to radiate from his work. “Thank you! Continuing to create and perform is what I love doing. I don’t have a process or a routine, I just do it when it comes. Planning tours and live shows is something that needs to be organised properly, especially from Perth, but I haven’t been touring much lately, so there’s more time to write and record”. At the beginning of the summer, The Stems toured our country, once again demonstrating that enduring love affair between Spanish audiences and Australian bands, something that Dom Mariani himself says he “can’t really answer very well” as to why it exists, although he has nothing but “gratitude to Spanish and European audiences for their support throughout all these years”.

An affair that will surely continue in the future with any of the projects with which Dom Mariani delights us. “The solo tour will probably be rescheduled for the spring, but I can’t say for certain at this stage”. So be it.

Marcos Sánchez



The Stems (1986) en el Hotel Old Melbourne. Imagen de Rob Lunardi

I hurt myself today



A Section by J. The Perfect Drug

Refreshing Music for the Summer

I remember that many years ago, on a radio station, they referred to an artist's song as "refreshing music for the summer". The urge to vomit meant that I could barely appreciate the refreshing quality of the tune on that sweltering August afternoon. It is a concept that has always disgusted me, but I understand that the problem is mine, you do not seek to cool yourself down with a song in the same way you would pour a glass of gazpacho over your head, but rather you need something more.

I also understand the idea, the masses need to reset their brains during their holidays, and what better than banal and empty music to have fun. Before, it was the damn "song of the summer" (in Italy, the song of the summer is called "tormentone", mind you… they have a clearer idea of it), the pinnacle of tackiness and the absence of good taste imaginable. The examples are terrifying, but there were songs like the one about mayonnaise that thousands of people danced to until exhaustion (probably without realizing that the song was about male ejaculation) or that portly man with glasses that would have made Bono in "The Fly" pale, humming something about a bomb. Oh, Georgie Dann, up there in heaven!

The truth is that none of that affects me anymore. I do not go out for afternoon drinks at beach bars or from pub to pub along the coast until the early hours of the morning. But what does affect me is seeing how the summer festival business creates a leisure ecosystem that brings together that whole concept of "refreshing" that we could apply to what that eager radio host was trying to express. And it poisons me to see how so many festivals always rely on practically the same artists. Siloé, Sexy Zebras, La La Love You, León Benavente (someone please explain to me what people see in these guys), Niña Polaca, Lori Meyers, Arde Bogotá, La M.O.D.A., Leiva, Viva Suecia, Alcalá Norte, Pignoise (really?)… even the infamous Taburete regularly have a place at these events. All of them, and many others, keep appearing over and over again at festivals, occupying the top positions on the bills, and the rest, well, gets filled with whatever you have closest at hand, without even caring too much whether they can sing (another can of worms to open, the "karaoke" concerts). Because there are bands that even claim that they form in order to play at festivals, can you imagine that? It is only logical that when you look at the bill of any event, you see the same old names and then a whole host of artists whom nobody even knows in their own homes. I certainly will not miss Iván Ferreiro if he is not on the line-up, but fuck… do you know how many artists, how many bands… are busting their asses and nobody pays them any attention? I could make an endless list of bands and artists who would liven things up without any problem if they were given the opportunity. I have always thought that bands like The Soul Jacket should be the kind of act that any mainstream festival could and should always include to add colour, rhythm and personality. It is not about removing La La Love You for "your favourite band", it is about the fact that, beyond the obviously commercial component, there are options for putting together festivals more successfully. But apparently not, that is how things are and that is what is left for us strange creatures of the night: to keep being the weird kids in the class.



Cities That Inspire Songs



Artists in general, and musicians in particular, seek inspiration in the most unexpected places. Just ask people like Nick Cave or Josh Homme. Loves, losses, stories of revenge, or even the need to exorcise feelings that need to be expelled. But if there is one thing that, for decades, has prompted artists from all over the world to feel compelled to write songs, it has been a city. Any city you can think of is bound to have inspired someone to express, through words or a few chords, what those streets, those lights or those people make them feel. The examples are countless, but… we have selected some of our favourite songs about cities.

"Belfast Child", Simple Minds

One of the most intense moments of my life was when I visited Belfast sometime around 2000. We were a bunch of kids coming from a language school in Dublin, eager to visit what was possibly the most troubled place in what was then pre-euro old Europe. Belfast was grey, very grey, especially the Catholic area. Grey, depressing and claustrophobic. Michael, the teacher at the academy, not much of a joker and well aware of my habit of constantly taking photos, grabbed me by the arm while I was holding one of those disposable cameras (the number of cameras I lost…) and told me very clearly: "Don't even think about taking pictures. That group over there on the corner is from the IRA. They don't know you. If they see you taking photos, they could think anything, and none of it would be good." I turned around awkwardly and saw a group of guys wrapped up to their eyebrows in coats, looking at us in a distinctly unfriendly way. Obviously, I didn't even take the camera out of my coat. Belfast… burned into my memory. And the Scottish band Simple Minds must have felt something similar when they recorded "Belfast Child". Released in 1989 on "Street Fighting Years", it grew out of "She Moved Through the Fair", a traditional Irish song that the band heard in a version by The Pogues. But Jim Kerr and the rest of the band took that melody into different territory, marked by the conflict in Northern Ireland. Belfast appears here as a symbol of a city and a society wounded by decades of violence between Catholics and Protestants, nationalists and unionists. It is not a song that explicitly takes sides, but rather a reflection on the human consequences of an entrenched conflict.



The "Belfast child" (the same one who appears in the striking black-and-white video) represents precisely those who are born and grow up amid violence they did not choose. The song was written at a particularly significant moment, when the conflict was still ongoing, although the first signs of possible dialogue were beginning to emerge. Its solemn and almost spiritual tone reinforces that sense of mourning, but also of hope. Rather than speaking only about Belfast, Simple Minds speaks about any place where one generation inherits the wounds of another, and they do so with an epic structure that gives you goosebumps. That crescendo with the brass is truly haunting. I strongly recommend watching the 2008 live version featuring the

much-missed Sinéad O'Connor, who sings the first part with the original lyrics of "She Moved Through the Fair".
Javistone

"Córdoba", Medina Azahara
Appearing on their acclaimed album "Aixa" (2002), "Córdoba" has become one of the most emblematic songs by the legendary Andalusian rock band. The lyrics are a lyrical tribute to the city where they were born, and were written by Manuel Martínez (vocals). In them, he expresses a deep love and admiration for the city, highlighting its beauty, cultural richness and distinctive charm. Clear references such as "white Christian and Moorish queen" allude directly to the city's history, a place where different cultures coexisted, as well as to its welcoming character, "doors wide open to humanity". Verses such as "In my dreams I walk alone through the corners that adorn you, the scent of orange blossom and jasmine nights" evoke those typical Andalusian summer nights, where the author invites us to lose ourselves in the city's charm. The band perfectly blends elements of progressive rock and flamenco, accompanied, moreover, by the Córdoba Symphony Orchestra, which further emphasises the song's dreamlike quality, turning it into an immortal anthem.
Marcos Sánchez

"Berlin", Lou Reed
Following the success of "Transformer", his previous LP, Lou Reed surprised everyone with a deeply dark and depressing album that contrasts wildly with its predecessor. Written as a rock opera, "Berlin" (1973) deals with the decadent and turbulent relationship between Jim and Caroline, two marginal characters whose tumultuous lives revolve around addiction, prostitution and the savagery of the streets, with the German city serving as a constant metaphor for alienation, isolation and an uncertain future in the midst of the Cold War. Everything is filtered through the author's raw and visceral narrative style. The title track, which opens the album, places the action in the memory of Caroline's birthday, apparently in a bar. For it, Lou Reed reworks his own song released two years earlier, in which we are introduced to a small Berlin café with an intimate and romantic atmosphere, "It was very nice, Candlelight and Dubonnet on ice", where music can be heard: "We were in a small café, You could hear the guitars play". However, when the chorus arrives, a feeling of melancholy and loss emerges, "Hey babe, I'm gonna miss you now that you're gone", suggesting that everything is part of a past memory through the repetition of the same phrase, "One sweet day". The song perfectly captures the duality between an apparently sweet and perfect day and the pain caused by the loss that this memory evokes. In the 1973 version, shorter and without a chorus, this pain is emphasised by almost agonising silences accompanying the sad piano riff that surrounds the song and serves, as we have said, as a prelude to the story of the album's two protagonists.
Marcos Sánchez



"Streets of Minneapolis", Bruce Springsteen
There are songs that are like documentaries recalling bygone eras, characters, situations or events. Bob Dylan is like an album of old photographs: when you listen to his songs, it feels as though you are watching Nixon on television and the Viet Cong is wiping out dozens of young American troops at that very moment. You can almost smell the napalm, as when you listen to "Fortunate Son" by Creedence Clearwater Revival. "Sunday Bloody Sunday" makes you feel as though you can sense the pain of the citizens of Enniskillen (Northern Ireland again) following a terrible attack. And what can we say about that "Strange Fruit" that Billie Holiday made her own so that, if we closed our eyes, we could feel the fear of having a particular skin colour at that time in the American South. Songs that are windows into crucial moments in modern human history.

However, sometimes, unfortunately, one of those songs is written in your own present, a moment that is just as critical, necessary songs as a cry of desperation, art coming to the rescue, as some might put it. And the cry of desperation that Bruce Springsteen displays in the colossal "Streets of Minneapolis" is the same one his mentor Dylan expressed in "Blowing in the Wind". It is not a song constructed with the usual distance of the narrator who observes and tells the story, but an immediate reaction to events that outraged him to the point of writing, recording and releasing it practically within a matter of days.

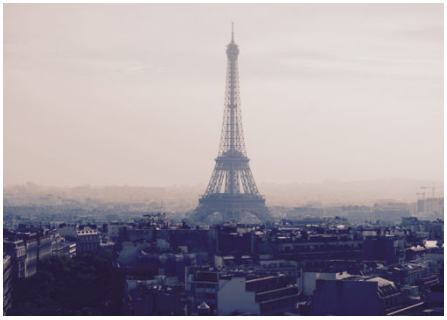
Minneapolis is more than just a setting. It is the specific place where, in January 2026, two citizens, Renée Good and Alex Pretti, died in incidents involving federal immigration agents. Springsteen explicitly dedicates the song to their families, the city's residents and their immigrant neighbours. The title inevitably refers to "Streets of Philadelphia", but the tone is radically different. There, Springsteen spoke about illness, isolation and death; here, he turns the streets of Minneapolis into the setting for a frontal political denunciation of Donald Trump, ICE… whom he names without hesitation or fear. There are no elaborate metaphors or fictional characters: the names of the dead, the streets, the gunshots and the protesters all appear. The song works as both a chronicle and a protest, but also as a document of a specific moment. Springsteen is documenting the injustice caused by a madman, and that immediacy is its greatest virtue: "Streets of Minneapolis" does not want, despite itself, to become a historical song. It wants to be a song written while history is happening, doing so with a composition full of vitality that inspires hope rather than fear. Pain, yes. Fear, no. This comes from someone who is not a great Springsteen fan: songs that reconcile you with humanity.
Javistone

"San Francisco Days", Chris Isaak
The brilliant singer-songwriter from Stockton, California, writes in this folk-rock ballad an ode to the nostalgia of lost love, setting it in the city of San Francisco and taking us through its streets, beaches and corners, where everything seems to remind him of his beloved. The song, featured on the musician's fourth studio album of the same title, begins with a line that is repeated throughout the song and makes its nostalgic nature immediately clear: "I still love you, I still want you, I still need you, don´t hang up and say goodbye". It tells us how, despite having met another girl, "I meet a girl in Mexico", he remains anchored to his former love, "I should of told her then I know, that I still think of you", and how those memories are tied to the city of San Francisco and its places (the iconic Market Street is mentioned). The author's soft, elegant and sensual voice underscores all these feelings, adding sincerity and vulnerability to the lyrics and making the listener feel those same emotions. A song that, rather than describing a place, describes the memories tied to that place itself, which



becomes an emotional refuge for the author.
Marcos Sánchez

"Free Man in Paris", Joni Mitchell



If there is one artist in the world of music who stands out for her incredible ability to tell stories, it is undoubtedly Canadian singer-songwriter Joni Mitchell. And yes, this time we are bending the rules a little, since the song we have chosen is not actually about the French capital, but it tells, in extraordinary fashion, a story that took place there.

Following the immense success of "Blue", her fourth album, Canadian singer-songwriter Joni Mitchell left Reprise Records to sign with the newly established Asylum Records, founded by her friend David Geffen, alongside other artists such as Linda Ronstadt, The Eagles and Jackson Browne. During something of a retreat between 1972 and 1973, Mitchell travelled around Europe with Geffen, The Band guitarist Robbie Robertson and his wife Dominique.

During that trip, Geffen told the singer-songwriter how overwhelmed he felt by the pressures of the music industry, the suffocating workload and the hectic life in Los Angeles, and how his stay in Paris was helping him escape from all that and enjoy being anonymous. That story inspired the lyrics of "Free Man in Paris", included on the 1974 album "Court and Spark", in which Joni Mitchell describes a free man: "I was a free man in Paris, I felt unfettered and alive", far from the phone calls: "There was nobody calling me up for favors, and no one's future to decide", driven above all by the desire to escape: "If I had my way, I'd just walk through those doors and wander down the Champs Elysees", while feeling overwhelmed by the responsibilities of his work: "But for the work I've taken on, Stocking the star maker machinery behind the popular song". A fabulous song in which the artist showcases her immense lyrical richness, accompanied by a sweet flute melody and her acoustic guitar, played in the finest L.A. folk-rock tradition.
Marcos Sánchez

"New York, New York" (Frank Sinatra)
There are cities that have songs, and then there is New York, which seems to have a discography of its own. So many songs have been written about it that you suspect that, if all its musicians disappeared one day, the city could simply keep playing by itself. Of all of them, none is as recognisable as "New York, New York".



The song was originally written by songwriters John Kander and Fred Ebb for the film "New York, New York" (1977), directed by Martin Scorsese and starring Robert De Niro and Liza Minnelli, with the idea that Judy Garland's daughter would perform it, but the truth is that the first version was rejected by… Robert De Niro! Kander and Ebb had to rework it until they arrived at a version closer to the one we know today. Within the context of the film, Minnelli performed it as a declaration of intent from someone arriving in the city determined to conquer the world. But then Sinatra appeared and decided that it could be his too. He began performing it live in 1978 and eventually incorporated it into his repertoire. In 1980, he recorded it for "Trilogy: Past Present Future", and that was when the definitive transformation took place: the song ceased to belong solely to a film and became one of the city's great anthems. Sinatra also changed the lyrics. While Minnelli sings "If I can make it there, I'll make it anywhere" as an aspiration , Sinatra sings it like someone who has already done the work and has come to explain to us how this whole business of making it works. When Franky starts singing about being "the king of the hill", it becomes rather difficult to argue with him, doesn't it?

The song is obviously about New York, but it is also about ambition, success and that very American idea that there is a place where you can prove what you are worth. And what better setting than a city that has spent decades selling itself as the place where anything can happen, both good and bad, of course. A song that sounds as ostentatious and, at the same time, as grand as the city itself.
Javistone

"Gotham", Gata Cattana
Gotham City is the fictional city where Bruce Wayne, the alter ego of DC Comics superhero Batman, lives. It is associated with negative characteristics such as evil, darkness, corruption, decay and the night… in contrast to the brightness and hopeful outlook of Metropolis, where Superman lives. This is the city Gata Cattana chooses as a metaphor to explain the decadent, hostile and grey scene she fought against every day through her lyrics, confronting the impositions and dictates of the music market. The popular rapper and poet from Granada, who became a generational symbol of the feminist struggle and who, sadly, left us in 2017 at just 26 years of age, asserts her artistic independence: "No quiero que me digan lo que quiero escuchar, escribo lo que quiero escuchar", and the real value of her words, rejecting empty slogans and disposable lyrics: "saliva cotiza como la plata", giving her lyrics a universal message that conquers spaces: "primero conquistaremos Manhattan, de Berlín a Beirut y luego Creta", and using them as a beacon in the face of a hostile and dark society: "señales luminosas desde Gotham".

The artist also destigmatises mental health, suggesting that she uses her songs as a form of therapy: "Le digo a mi psiquiatra yo es que soy muy poeta, Me gusta mis penitas compartirlas, les hago aviones con esas historias", and adopts a much more intimate tone when describing a love relationship and using that love as physical and mental relief: "Te dejo los mapas en la mesita, debajo de la ropa los kilos que me quitas". She also concludes with a gesture of resistance in the face of destruction: "Y si ardiera la ciudad, siempre estuve prepará", once again placing her poetic and artistic vocation ahead of everything else as a weapon against the darkness and hostility of the world around her: "La catástrofe mundial y yo cantando, sería un buen final para mi cuento". Musically, Gata placed great importance on musicality when rapping, incorporating elements of flamenco and sometimes rock, but always giving great importance to the message and the value of the lyrics, thus bringing together her two passions: poetry and music.
Marcos Sánchez



Let's Say I'm Talking... About Madrid



Madrileños are always accused of being centralist and of hogging all the emotions. I'm not going to deny it, but what is undeniable is that our city is open to everything and everyone. That feeling of being a gateway for anyone who wants to come in has given us quite a few songs that often portray perfectly the spirit of a city where we can, and should, live together in harmony. Here is a small selection of songs about Madrid by bands and solo artists who belong to the Rock Bottom imaginary.

"Madrid", Burning, "Madrid", 1978
"You'll have to feel Madrid's caresses on your skin / And write with your blood / Madrid, you are my woman". I've mentioned at some point in the pages of this great magazine that, for me, "Madrid" is the best and greatest R&R album ever written in Spanish, and I always defend it tooth and nail, or rather, cape and pen, since I'm a pacifist after all. A flawless album, with songs that, forty-eight years later, remain unbeatable and untouchable. And what better way to start than with this anthem of youth that opened the LP, and which for many of us embodied better than anything else what it meant to belong to this dirty and tough city. The intro with fairground music (or carousel music) sets the journey in motion, plugging the Burning machinery in at full throttle, with that "Stones-like" accent that characterised them, and verses that demonstrate both hatred and passion for their city, which will not stop until the emotional epic that closes the collection of songs called "Sin tiempo para vivir", perhaps the most dramatic ode to the heroine born in this country of nonsense and carnival.

"Este Madrid", Leño, "Leño", 1979
Another anthem of that generation that grew up on the streets of the neighbourhood, with cassette tapes and litre bottles of beer, with no desire for the future, simply taking each day as it came, in that Madrid that, as Rosendo sang, "This Madrid is a shit / Even the rats don't want to live here". Lyrics that perfectly portrayed that grey, polluted city, yes, with rats running across the asphalt, which was growing bigger and bigger alongside us, a city we hated and loved in equal measure. "Leño" does not reach the musical wisdom of "Madrid", but it is just one step behind, with songs, particularly this dramatic tribute to our city, that have also remained in hibernation since the moment they were composed and still, at least for me, give me goosebumps.

"Pongamos que hablo de Madrid", Joaquín Sabina, "Malas compañías", 1980 / Antonio Flores, "Al caer el sol", 1981
I have to confess that I first heard Antonio's version, even assuming that it was a song he had written himself. Some time later, I discovered that it belonged to that troubadour from Úbeda, who had been based in Madrid since time immemorial and was a faithful creature of the night in a city where, if you want to, as he did for so many years, you never sleep. Mr Sabina's immense songwriting ability is beyond doubt. You may like him a lot, a little or not at all (I wouldn't know where I stand), but as I was saying, all his songs are written in such a way that they have to say something to you, they have to stir something inside you, and this is a perfect example, especially for those of us who live in Madrid.

"The sun is a butane heater / Life is a metro about to leave / There's a syringe in the bathroom / Let's say I'm talking about Madrid". Antonio Flores made it his own, giving it an energetic guitar-driven edge with a memorable sax solo and changing the sad ending of the original, perhaps adapting it to his own life: "When death comes to visit me / Take me south, where I was born / There's no room for anyone here / Let's say I'm talking about Madrid" as opposed to: "When death comes to visit me / Don't wake me, let me die / I have lived here and here I want to stay / Let's say I'm talking about Madrid". (Do not miss the moving and, at times, chilling documentary "Flores para Antonio", made by his daughter Alba. Very, very highly recommended.)

"En las calles de Madrid", Loquillo y Trogloditas, "Dónde estabas tú en el 77", 1984
"Tell Pepe Risi that he can smile now / He killed the silence in the streets of Madrid". Written by his loyal right-hand man for many years, Sabino Méndez, this time the city was glorified, probably because it was written by a Barcelonian who only came to Madrid on record-company business and did not have to live there. That quality of someone discovering hidden treasures is what defines the verses. Ultimately, it is an ode to the vibrant nightlife of the capital: from the "dandies" (mods) showing their cheekiness to the much-missed artist Ceeseepe, and that tribute to the great Pepe Risi, guitarist of their friends Burning, who filled the endless nights of the country's capital with his good nature and rock & roll.

"Pobre Madrid", Barón Rojo, "Tierra de Nadie", 1987
Subtly inspired, in my view, by the lyrics of "Este Madrid", the beloved José Luis Campuzano ("Sherpa") delivers a biting, mostly nostalgic critique of the transformation of the city of Madrid, from longing for his childhood to the social and political changes that transformed the city, leaving its essence and charm behind. But this entire pessimistic vision turns into hope in the final stretch of the song: "I only wish that the Madrid that was lost would return". One of those songs that make you think, that invite you to reflect on the identity and future of your city. One of the great and most epic songs of the Barons' career, which, as a Madrileño, fills me with joy and satisfaction every time I listen to it, on an underrated album containing some of the best lyrics and songs of their career.

"Madrid / Lady Madrid", Pereza, "Animales", 2005 / "Aviones", 2009
Illustrious walkers of its streets and passionate photographers of nights that turn into days, Rubén Pozo and Leiva composed two fabulous tributes to their city: "Madrid" and "Lady Madrid". "Casa Paco", "Noches en Siroco", "Terracita Antón Martín" and "Ese bar de Tirso que te gusta tanto a ti" are some of the places Rubén sings about in this elegy to Madrid and his girl. One of those simple, polished songs that, before you realise it, has become embedded in your skin. "You are my favourite corner of Madrid". "Lady Madrid", sung by the troubadour Leiva, is dedicated to a groupie, always behind the stage, "with more nights than the moon", with mentions of Burning, Los Ronaldos and Lou Reed, the first two essential connoisseurs of a city that does not want to go to bed. As a curiosity, I should mention that groupies of some renown, such as Pamela des Barres (Miss Pamela), were often given the title of "Lady".

"Madrid nos pertenece", Biznaga, "Bremen no existe", 2022
Heirs to the combative legacy of bands such as The Clash and Northern Irish band Stiff Little Fingers, the Madrileños Biznaga have been storming stages and challenging consciences since 2012, driven by the commitment of their lyrics and their fighting spirit. And, of course, Madrid has a place in their guerrilla idealism with this true protest anthem that raises more than passions at their concerts. "From Hortaleza to Carabanchel / Some people know how to organise themselves". Released as a single in 2022, the band themselves describe it as a "poplitical rallying cry", demanding the use of public space in opposition to commercial boredom. A call to reclaim the streets from the market of boredom and to reclaim the city. "Madrid belongs to you and me".
J. L. Crespo, "ZepiSoul"

The Soulbreaker Company





“We have no problem following those who are ahead of us. I think we don’t ask ourselves too many questions, we go with the flow, we stay in line, and “Ant Row” is about trying to break away from that, trying to stop blindly following the person in front of you because it seems like the only way to exist in this society. I don’t like to proselytise, it’s just a song, but we live as if we were in a line of ants.”

One of the greatest bands this country has produced over the last two decades. That is what they now call a “facto”, something that simply is what it is, period. Since they began their journey in 2003, they have built a superb discography in which, with every album they have released, they have expanded their stature while doing the same with their sound. On the strength of essential albums, epic and immortal songs, unforgettable concerts, The Soulbreaker Company have forged a name that endures and remains standing despite all the hardships they have had to face: line-up changes, COVID, the industry, the disappearance of venues, infections… and they continue to release albums like their latest, “Sins”, which, as expected, is yet another gem to keep in the collection.

This interview almost didn't happen, at least not in the way it had originally been planned. The summer season means that we all become physically and mentally scattered, but fortunately I was able to get in touch with Jony, who kindly takes my call… from a beach bar… in Almuñécar! Jony is one hell of a guy, without a doubt, and what a singer, fuck. After numerous interviews, I needed to have a long and thorough chat with him, and we were able to talk about the band's career, the stylistic shifts on each album, how they have seen themselves with each release, the songs he has written… and La Pantoja's backing singers! Another thing I can now cross off my list of things to do, talking to Jony from The Soulbreaker Company and showing him my deepest and most sincere admiration.

Hi Jony, where are you?
I'm in Almuñécar.
That's close to where I am.

Yes, well, I'm from here. I'm from Almuñécar.
You're kidding…

Yes, yes. I've been living in the Basque Country since I was fourteen or so, but I'm from Almuñécar, my whole family is from Almuñécar, and I always come here in the summer.
I go there from time to time because Jesse, the magazine's second-in-command, has been spending his summers there all his life, and we usually meet up there with both our families.
For us, for me, I mean, I live in the north, which is a gloomy place, Vitoria is a cool city, but it's a very dark city. It's not that it rains a lot or anything, it's just that there isn't much light. So when I come here, for me, this is the greatest thing ever, really.

Night and day, then.
Totally, and as I get older I'm finding it harder and harder to deal with. I handle winter, short nights, short days, the cold, all of that really well, but the light, that kills me, man. So when I come here I try to stay as long as possible. It's great, because with the kids and being on holiday, this is fantastic.

Right. Well, getting down to business… it's been more than twenty years since you started playing together, the band was formed in 2003. A year later you recorded your first demo and in 2005 you released your first album, "Hot Smoke & Heavy Blues". What can you tell me about that album with the perspective of all the time that has passed since then? By the way, it's the only album that isn't on streaming platforms, only on Bandcamp.
It's on Bandcamp right now, but we're going to put it on streaming platforms. Our intention is to reissue it on vinyl at some point. We've been talking about it for a while, but in the end we never get around to it, but what is certain is that we're going to put it on streaming platforms this year, definitely. Honestly, I look back on that album with a lot of affection, because we were very young kids. We had just won the Villa de Bilbao, and one of the prizes was to record an album, a professional album, which for us was incredible, imagine that. We came from a city, Vitoria, which culturally I think is an important and attractive city. There were lots of concerts, lots of opportunities for musicians, but it's only one city and a lot of the time you didn't have much of a chance to get out or for people to know who you were. And when we won the Villa, well, obviously that was incredibly exciting. After winning the Villa, they called us to do our first tour, the first professional tour we did, and we did it with Mother Superior and a band from Bilbao called Hash, we played nine consecutive dates all over the peninsula. And, of course, then we went to record the album, which for us was a huge deal, what you've been waiting for ever since you start a band with your friends. I'm going to tell you something that I sometimes forget, but they suggested that Mike Farris, the singer of Screamin' Cheetah Wheelies, should play with us on "Hot Smoke & Heavy Blues", that we should send him the song and have him add vocals, imagine that, for kids like us who were, well, in our early twenties at the time, to be told that you're going to record an album, you're going to go on tour, I was with Mother Superior, who we absolutely loved at the time, and one of your songs is going to be sung by Mike Farris, who is the singer of the fucking Screamin' Cheetah Wheelies, well, imagine that, for us it was fucking incredible. In the end, the Farris thing didn't happen because, as Eneko later told us at the time, he was having a lot of problems with drugs.

Yes, we spoke to him and he told us that it was a difficult period because of his addictions.
In any case, I remember "Hot Smoke & Heavy Blues" with a great deal of affection. I'm not going to tell you that I listen to it regularly, but I listened to it recently because we wanted to put it on the streaming platforms, and I'm surprised when I see the choices we made, remembering how we wrote that album and the songs… everything. And now I see it from a different perspective, of course. It's the typical first album by a band that is into rock, that hasn't developed yet or that has very clearly defined tastes and influences. Of course, we've evolved since then, but that was the foundation that allowed us to get to where we are now. Of course, it's been almost twenty-five years of a career, seven albums. I think we've done everything that a band like us could possibly have set out to do while remaining underground. In other words, we know perfectly well that we're not a first-line band or anything like that, but we know that we're a band with its own audience, an audience that is fucking loyal and has always followed us, that has been following us for years, that keeps up with us… We get messages from all fucking over the place, Javi, we were even asked from Russia to do the intro for a TV series in Russia…

No way…
Yes, yes... those are the kinds of things that blow your mind, of course. One of our songs was also used in a beer commercial in the United States, they called us because they wanted it for the ad, imagine that. A lot of things have happened to us as a result of that. And for me, the foundation of everything that has happened to us is that album, things that make you feel fucking fulfilled as a musician.

In 2005 you were already playing at Azkena, on the Thursday opening of the festival, alongside Los DelTonos, Wilco and The Steepwater Band, not bad, right? Did you feel a certain sense of vertigo at the beginning, or was it something that came naturally?
I don't think we felt any vertigo, it actually seemed logical and normal to us, I think we had that ambition that comes with being young. I mean, we did what we did with so much enthusiasm that… I don't want to sound cocky, but I don't think we had any rivals at that point when it came to going onstage and playing, the desire we had… and we didn't care whether we played before or after any band, we had that youthful arrogance of being sure that we were going to measure up. And I think we did. Later we became friends with The Steepwater Band, and we're still friends to this day. In fact, we were with them when we recorded "Sins" in Chicago, which is where they're from. Now that you mention it, and looking back, if you think about it, it really is impressive how much we did in such a short time back then. But we were very confident in ourselves, without wanting to sound presumptuous, we were going all out.

Just two years later you released what many considered to be the first Soulbreaker Company album, "The Pink Alchemist". You changed labels, moving to Alone Records, which at the time was backing bands such as Viaje a 800, and you recorded in Madrid. I understand that it was a major step forward in search of something new, developing and finding your personality, a distinctive and very clearly defined identity. The blues is still there, the seventies sounds are still there, but the sound expands, and psychedelia begins to emerge. At what point does someone… or a group as a whole decide to think: "Come on, let's go further and see what happens", and venture into unfamiliar territory?
I always think these things happen naturally when you don't cling to a style. The first one is an album where the influences you've been listening to are clear. If you listen to that album, you know exactly which bands we've been listening to, you know perfectly well. What happens is that the band grows, you grow too and you listen to other things. And it's not that you do it consciously or unconsciously, because we've never said "let's do this". We've always taken the songs to the rehearsal room, we've fought over them, gone over them twenty thousand times until we were all happy with them… Now, if you tell me the truth, you're not aware of the final result of many albums until you hear the mastered version. It's something that happens to us quite often, people ask us "what is this album going to sound like?", and

I always answer, well, I don't know, I need to wait until I hear the finished album as a whole. Of course, I do care that we're a recognisable band, not because we have a defined style like "look, these guys who play boogie or hard rock…", but because we sound like ourselves. Look, around the time of "The Pink Alchemist", I approached that album thinking about soul, more soul than I had done on the previous album, which may have been more inspired by Southern rock. In the end, I don't think there's ever any such plan, we don't think about it. Besides, bear in mind that we had the opportunity to record in Madrid with some fucking great musicians who did arrangements for us that gave the album an incredible new life. The saxophone, the flute, the backing vocals… Fuck, those backing vocals! The backing singers on that album are… Isabel Pantoja's backing singers!

No way.

Fuck, I swear to you. The backing singers on that album, those women, are Isabel Pantoja's backing singers, and they sang like fucking angels. The three women were in the studio and gave us a hand. We'd tell them "look, do this or that", and they'd just go for it, the three of them would harmonise together and off they'd go, man. To me it sounded heavenly, and they were the fucking backing singers for Pantoja, absolute professionals, the very best. Who would have thought it, there's a The Soulbreaker Company/La Pantoja connection. (Laughs) And all those arrangements enriched it enormously, they changed the direction quite a bit compared with what we had brought from "Hot Smoke & Heavy Blues". The production of "Hot Smoke & Heavy Blues" was completely different from what we did afterwards. We tried to look for more things, to improve.

Just two years later came "Ítaca". Some people say that it was with this album that you finally found your own voice, there is no trace of the seventies sound anymore. The power is still enormous, but you take your foot off the accelerator, the music breathes more… how did you experience that musical and emotional evolution?

"Ítaca" was an album that came out in 2010, but we had planned for it to come out much earlier. Almost the following year, after "The Pink Alchemist". What happened was that Dave Anderson, who owned the studio and was the bassist of Groundhogs, had an aneurysm and delayed us for quite some time when we already had the whole album ready. So what we did then was… go over the songs again and again, even though they were actually already finished. If it hadn't been for what happened to Dave, we wouldn't have revisited so many things and we would probably have ended up with an album more similar to "The Pink Alchemist". We generally record an album in three or four months. Here, if you add up what we had already invested before recording it and then the time we spent going over it, we were at it for almost a year. That is the first reason why it is so different from the previous album. And then there was the place where we went to record it and who we went there to record it with… the whole experience. It was the first time we had gone abroad to record, and the person we were going to record with was an idol of ours. We loved Groundhogs. Then there was the place, Foel Studio is in an isolated spot in the mountains of Wales, and there was a tremendous snowfall. Those things became part of the album, I mean, when I arrived and listened to it, I felt that all of that had somehow gone into the album. It was an album that, beyond the influences or how we wanted to make it, had a lot of magic, and I think that magic is captured on the album.

There are songs on that album like "Where the mermaids sing loud" that still give me goosebumps. And "Sow the roses" is one of my favourite songs of all time, I would definitely put it among my top 50. With a beautiful video, too.

Yes, it was made by Paul Urkijo Alijo, who is now a film director (Guillermo del Toro has said of Urkijo that he is one of the great figures of European fantasy cinema. Ed.), but he wasn't then, and he came to make a music video for us to have in his portfolio. Paul is also a musician, a really cool guy. And I wrote the song on acoustic guitar, which is why I appear in the video with the acoustic guitar. (Laughs)

What is "Sow the Roses" about?

It's a song I wrote for my brother who, because of circumstances in life, went to live in Japan, it's a bit of a farewell song, an emotional one. I thought I was going to lose him, so to speak, he wasn't going to be there. It talks about him taking one of the water pistols we used to play with when we were kids. It's a song with many meanings associated with our childhood.

And "Where the mermaids sing loud"?

Look, I told you I'm from Almuñécar, but I live in the Basque Country, and sometimes… perhaps not so much now, but there were times when it was more difficult for me to find an identity, to know whether you're from here or from there. In fact, that's how the song begins, saying "where are you from?". In the end I'm neither from here nor from there, I'm from wherever my children grow up. So the song is about how, when you're with someone you love, that is your place. And I think "Ítaca" as a whole talks a lot about that. There are more songs that talk about what each person's place is, "Ítaca" really always evokes that, the place where you are loved, where people love you… that is your place.

We get to 2014 and with "Graceless" there is a turning point in that it is the first time there are changes in the band's line-up, which in fact becomes a constant from now on with every album. The title seems cryptic, and the feeling is that this is an album where you strip away everything unnecessary, you sound somehow… more transparent. What did that album mean for your career?

No, actually we recorded "Graceless" with the original members. It was after "Graceless" that José Javier Manzanedo, the bassist, left. As for the album, I can tell you that we were clear that we wanted to record it on analogue, we wanted to try it. Since we had just come off a really extensive tour, playing, I think for two or three years…

It had a lot of mileage, that album…

Yes, a lot of mileage. So we found ourselves with a lot of money after touring so much. We've never made money for ourselves with the band, we've never divided up any money and everything has always gone back into the band. Well, at that point we had a lot of money and we said, "let's record on analogue". And we went to London, to Toe Rag Studios, Liam Watson's studio, famous because The White Stripes recorded their most famous album there, and they recorded it on analogue too. And well, that whole thing was overwhelming for us because we recorded the album without a click track. The guy was very demanding with us, he said without a click track and any musician will tell you, without a click track my arse. (Laughs) Well, this guy was like, "Don't you know how I record?". The truth is I have enormous affection for that album, but I don't think we'll ever do anything similar again, on analogue, unless it's a fucking massive fuck-up, it stayed that way.

Of course, editing analogue is a whole thing.

Imagine the whole thing, editing meant taking the tape, cutting it, sticking it back together… completely, totally analogue. I talked about it with Andoni many times, like, fuck, that album perhaps turned out a little sad, more subdued, it wasn't the natural evolution of "Ítaca". And when I say natural, I mean that in quotation marks, because none of our albums has been the natural evolution of the previous one.

There is no specific logic in your career in particular, or in music in general. There is no logic to the evolution of a musician or an artist. When a musician does things honestly, they have to turn out the way they turn out, naturally, right? Obviously, if you do things with a specific objective, whether commercial, artistic, evolutionary… consciously, then it is possible, but when you do it simply for the love of it, the logical and normal thing is for there to be no logic to that evolution.

Yes, I agree with what you're saying. In any case, I think that, of all the albums, the one that broke the mould the most was "Graceless", I mean, it was the most different. I think it is still the most different, although each one has its own thing. It's also true that, for me, it was a somewhat dark period because of things that were happening in my personal life. And despite everything, I don't know why I love that album, I have tremendous affection for it, even though it was fucking hard to record that album, really hard. We had absolutely no feeling with Liam Watson. His equipment was fucking shit, we had to change a lot of it. He was very good as a technician and he handled analogue recording down to the last detail, but the recording was hard. If you listen to that



album with affection, you realise there are a lot of fuck-ups, but fuck-ups that don't necessarily ruin the song. It happens to me with Zeppelin albums too, where suddenly you notice that they've put an extra snare hit in or things like that. We would listen to it thousands of times once it was recorded and wonder how the hell we were going to fix that.

Is that why it's called "Graceless", perhaps?
We fight over our album titles and then we let them go, and sometimes they don't have any kind of meaning or sense at all. I don't remember exactly why this one was called that, but I'm sure it came after a big argument, where it was like, if we don't call it this, we'll call it that, and somehow we eventually reached that agreement, who knows how.

In 2016 we have "La Lucha", the first and so far only time you've used a title in Spanish. I imagine "Struggle" didn't convey exactly the same thing. You also include a song with a title in Basque, which in Spanish would be "Las lágrimas de Alberti", a sublime song, by the way. Is it an album about survival?
"La Lucha" is one of my favourite albums of our entire career. And it's probably the most laid-back album we have, with more mid-tempo songs, it has songs that genuinely move me. I think it has some of the best tracks of our career, we went to Bristol to record it. I remember the recording going quite well, Steff Hambrook was a fucking genius, he helped us enormously. He did the arrangements with the vibraphone and xylophone. I also like it a bit because of what you're saying, the songs also have a message, what you were saying is clear, there was a struggle. Probably, at that time, what may have been the most important political development of my life was taking place, in terms of my political thinking, and in some way I wanted to capture that. In fact, the song called "La Lucha" talks about heroes who are not very well known and the things they have done, regardless of whatever ideology they may have had. We were going to call it "Animals" or something like that, but I told them that I had a very clear idea of the concept of the album, and I said, "it's going to be called La Lucha", and they liked it. And as you said, "Struggle", in English, could have shifted the meaning slightly away from what I wanted to talk about and from what a struggle actually is. And then the cover was done by this guy from Branca Studio, Pol Albran, he's a fucking genius. We also tried to contact him for the last album, but in the end we couldn't. But I remember when he sent us that cover, which has nothing to do with politics or anything like that, the one with the horses running across the meadow… it blew our minds.

I love it, I think it fits very well, in the end it conveys the feeling of wild animals running and, in some way, fighting.
Yes, exactly, it's a wild horse in a meadow, running, I think it's amazing. Then, I'll tell you the truth. Until we did the tour for that album, I didn't enjoy a single gig in my life. I enjoyed it after playing, you took all the weight off your shoulders. But I was always driving myself crazy thinking, fuck, I'm not going to hit the note here or there, I don't know what or whatever… And with that album I completely changed my mindset, I said to myself, "look, I've been doing this for I don't know how long, and either I start enjoying it now or that's it", because that's what I make music for. And the truth is that the whole tour was wonderful. That was when I enjoyed playing the most. I really went out there to have a good time at the concerts, if I'm going to play, I'm going to have a good time. I was very much of a perfectionist, constantly thinking about whether I'd hit this note, whether I was going to do well on the other one… and that's probably another reason why I have so much affection for that album, because it changed me a little.

And why was that? Why that perfectionism and why that need for perfection and self-imposed pressure?
Because, fuck, in the end it was something I took very seriously. If we had two concerts, which was the usual thing, because if you had to leave Vitoria, you might as well make the most of it, I would play on Friday and go to sleep. I mean, I didn't want to go out or do anything, because we had to sing on Saturday. And I'm really embarrassed about going somewhere and not being able to hit the notes, not doing it well. It's never happened to me because I've made sure it didn't. But I'm genuinely embarrassed at the thought of someone coming, paying for their ticket, and me going there and singing off-key. I have enormous respect for someone who comes to see me, who is from some city God knows where, and I want to be fucking great, I want that person who came because they've listened to my songs to leave saying, "Fuck, that was great!". And I think it's the least you can do to be demanding of yourself so that the people who listen to your music and appreciate it keep wanting to come and see you. And at that time, for me, it was genuinely unhealthy, unhealthy to the point that it continued into "La Lucha".

There has to be a middle ground, which I imagine is the one you found. You have to be demanding and professional, but you have to enjoy it, because music and rock and roll, fuck… are made for that.
Don't get me wrong, I had a fucking great time afterwards. Once you'd played, it was a tremendous orgasm, after playing you felt like you'd taken about twenty weights off your shoulders.

The idea is not to carry that much weight.
Yes. But at that time I carried a lot of it. But with "La Lucha" I changed my mindset, and that tour was great, I enjoyed every concert. I had a fucking great time, of course, while maintaining a certain level of discipline, it's not like I stayed

out until six in the morning. My thing was to go and sing, and then I had a good time.

Some mutual friends have told me that nothing can bring The Soulbreaker Company down. (Laughs)
It's true, especially some of them, but yes. (Laughs)

In 2018 you closed an important chapter for the band with "Sewed With Light" (which means something like "Sewn with Light", that light is an obvious counterpoint to the concept of the previous struggle), bringing to a close a period of constant activity that had begun in 2003, and you went all the way to California to record it with Tim Green. Is it perhaps your most sophisticated album? Did it leave you, in some way, exhausted?
That's where there were official line-up changes. With "Sewed With Light", the biggest difference is that the line-up changes had already settled. And Javi Free is a very meticulous guy who has fitted in really well with the way we compose, but on top of that he is technically incredible. Not technically in terms of the instrument, although that too, but in terms of what recording actually means. When it comes to getting the right sound, he's a fucking genius, and I think he gave us a boost as a band that did us a world of good. I think you can hear it quite clearly. Regardless of whether it's a darker album or not, every song has a hundred million layers or backing vocals. We worked with a large professional choir, which was something I wanted to do. We also worked with an opera singer whom we brought in as an arrangement. But it was a fucking ambitious album and we were lucky enough to have someone like Javi, who was technically capable of handling what we had in mind.

I also think it's an album with less light, with less light than others.
Yes, for me too. And what I told you before. Javi, I don't realise what an album is like until I listen to it. And when I listened to that album, when we were getting ready to master it, I said, fuck, it turned out dark. I hadn't realised it, not even during rehearsals. Then there are songs that I also think are among the best of our entire career. "Persephone", for example, I think is a fucking great song. And musically I'm really proud of how we managed to make them, how we arranged them… I don't think it was received as well, I have the feeling that people didn't like it being so dark, but I'm still really proud of that album.

So now we come to "Sins": it's 2026, eight years without an album. I don't know what has happened during this time, whether you needed to rest, reflect, focus on other obligations, other projects, perhaps…
No, no… It seems like a huge amount of time, but a lot of things happened. We released "Sewed With Light" in 2018 and prepared the tour to start in February 2019. Then I had a really serious internal infection and was unable to function for almost six months. So by then we were already looking at almost after the summer of 2019.
And then COVID arrives.
Of course, and it seems like it was only in 2020, but in 2022 people were still wearing masks and keeping their distance, and things were still very difficult. So by 2023 we found ourselves with very few concerts, we had a 2018 album that hadn't been properly presented until 2022, and it didn't make much sense to do a tour in 2022 to promote an album from 2018. And then in 2023 we said: look, it's the band's twentieth anniversary, why don't we go on tour, take the songs, get some muscle back? So we did some concerts, we spent that year "simply" touring, in 2024 we started writing the next album and recorded it in 2025, but then it was delayed for various production-related reasons and eventually we got to 2026 and you think, "fuck"… so no, we haven't stopped or been on holiday.

Yes, from the outside there has been that impression.
It seems like COVID was one year, but it was several years. In 2022 I remember still doing concerts with people sitting down, wearing masks, and with reduced audiences. We were also contacted by ETB to do concerts, we did a few things, we weren't inactive. And we were lucky because, to some extent, people remember you and call you. But there were bands that didn't have that. And then there's another thing that is still having an impact: a lot of medium-sized venues that used to host bands like ours and were doing very well have disappeared. A lot of people have said that we had disappeared, but before there was never any problem getting concerts, you knew how the tour was going to work, because you knew who you had to call or who was going to call you. Now, because these medium-sized venues are no longer there, a lot of promoters don't dare to book you into a bigger one.

You have explained that you felt the need to make a more direct and less embellished album. More than an aesthetic decision, was it a personal need? Did you feel that you had to get rid of something in order to keep moving forward?
Personally, I think so, I didn't want to repeat what we did on "Sewed With Light". Look, I'm very proud of that album, I think that as musicians we reached a very good technical level. Many of the best songs of our career are on that album too, but I didn't want to do that again, I didn't feel like it. I wanted to do something, I'm not going to say simple, because really, even if the songs may seem simpler, getting to the point of composing them, getting a song that might seem simple at first to sound good and for you to like it, takes a fucking huge amount of work. It's not like inspiration just comes to you, and boom, bang, done…

Well, you're not the Ramones, nobody's going to think that. (Laughs) In fact, that's what the people who listen to you want, that complexity, that epic quality.
We had money left over from the previous tour and from the concerts we played during the pandemic, so we thought about doing something similar to what we did on "Graceless", something that was fairly direct, where everything we were doing live would come across well on the recording. That's why this studio in Chicago was a pretty good fit for us, and The Steepwater Band were there too. I love how the album has turned out.

> ***I remember that some very cool people, contributors to Radio 3 programmes, asked us for as much as six thousand euros to get us played on Radio 3. Seriously!***

The album, the album sounds like a fucking shot.
Also, with very little bullshit. The reverbs, for example, are all natural because of the way the studio is set up, there are hardly any layers or arrangements with pedals or effects. Almost everything you hear is how it sounds, completely natural. And I think so, that we came into it with the memory of "Sewed With Light" and thought, well, let's do something different, but it's true that you don't really realise it until you see the finished songs. We take them to the rehearsal room and go over them again and again, again and again. I don't feel that we worked any less, not at all, quite the opposite, because we were coming out of a period of a lot of inactivity, and we were really eager. We spent a lot of time working on the songs and doing a lot of things, but where before we would see that something sounded good and keep working on it, now we decided, "we're not going to add anything else if it already sounds good". We're not going to add a coda now, or two solos, or whatever... There will be better songs or worse songs, but it was what we felt like doing.

The album begins with "Ant Row", one of those songs that sticks with you from the first listen. "Ant line", is that how you feel we are nowadays?
I think that in general we have no problem following those who are ahead of us, I don't think we ask ourselves many questions, we go with the flow, we don't step out of line and the song is about trying to break away from that, trying to stop blindly following the person in front of you because it seems like the only way to exist in this society. I don't like to proselytise, it's just a song, but we live as if we were in an ant line, everyone follows the person before them because they believe that's what you have to do for this, for that… It's like a picture of what I think we are as a human species, because it's not just this country, it's the whole planet.

Another song that gives you goosebumps is "Abb Al Rahman".
"Abb Al Rahman" is a song I initially wrote on acoustic guitar. You know who he is, and as an Andalusian like me, you know that Abb Al

Rahman landed here in Almuñécar and that he has a statue here in my town, he landed in the square by San Cristóbal beach and the song is a kind of testament, it talks about death. About death and a little about the duality between north and south. I'm from here, but I live there. So that song says, well, if something happens to me, suddenly I'm going to leave a will saying that they should take a handful of my ashes and scatter them up there, but take another handful and scatter them here, in Almuñécar. That's my duality, north and south. And that song talks a little about that. It's also a song that could share some things with "Where the mermaids sing loud", where are you from? It's something more than the place where you were born. And Abb Al Rahman is a symbol, he has a statue here on the beach where I used to play as a child with my father and now I play there with my children. In the end it's a kind of living testament, just in case something happens to me.

It's an incredible lyric, it's easy to identify with something like that.
Thank you…

The recording at Steve Albini's Electrical Audio has been discussed, but I'm more interested in what happened afterwards. You have said that you decided to redo part of the work because you weren't completely satisfied. What made you take that step, and what did you learn from that process? The same thing happened to PJ Harvey with Albini's production on her second album.
Oh, really?

Yes, Albini received all the recognition and PJ Harvey decided to record it again on her own with her guitar, "4-Track Demos".
Fuck. Well, look, in this case it wasn't because of the production at Electrical Audio. We did several vocal arrangements, especially me, but I wasn't happy at all with how they had turned out, they sounded good, but kind of muddled, so I decided I wanted to record them again, not rearrange them, but record them again because I think they deserved it. And of course, that delayed us quite a bit, because we had to find another studio to record the backing vocals again, then we had to get another date with them for them to mix it. Then it had to be mastered, and that delayed us too. In short, it wasn't because of the studio, it was more our own thing, because of how we felt about the result of the arrangements we had done, rather than their production. And I'll tell you, I think the production on "Sins" is fucking great. As for them, they're incredible professionals, always looking for the best way to help, an amazing recording because of how simple it was, because of the respect they showed us at all times…

In what sense?
They went all out to make it sound the way we wanted, they made it a little bit their own. You might think, well, it's Albini's studio, you could think, "these guys are going to be full of themselves". On top of that, we're a Spanish band coming over here and they could treat us that way. Well, quite the opposite, the recording was one of the best experiences we've ever had in terms of technical ability, professionalism and personally.

Better than the one you recorded on analogue. (Laughs)
Fuck, nothing like it. (Laughs)

In several interviews you have described "Sins" as a more honest album. It's a very powerful word and also one that is open to interpretation. What exactly does honesty mean in your case? Does it have to do with the sound, the songs, or the stage of life you were in? And, above all, wasn't there honesty before?
I've probably said that, but I think that when I talk about that, I'm not talking about the sound, I'm talking about ourselves. Let's be honest with ourselves, this is what has come out of us and we're going with it, we're not going to do anything artificial. Let's be honest with ourselves. We've ended up with an album that is more direct, so we're not going to overthink it or try, I don't know, to force it so that maybe it sounds more like what we might think the Soulbreaker Company sound is. That's why I say honest.

Very sincere.
Yes, that's it. Of course, we've always been honest with ourselves, but this album comes from where it comes from, after so much time and so many line-up changes. Probably the most important changes happened before "Sins", especially with Andoni and Asier leaving, who are close friends. For me it was very hard, especially Andoni leaving. When he left, it was like… fuck, I started questioning a lot of things because I had a very strong relationship with him, not only in music, but also in rehearsals, in everything. And, in fact, a few years ago I started another band and he's playing with me now. I think all of that had a big influence. With line-up changes, at first it's a little difficult to find your way with the band, to understand how we compose, how we work… and surely the issue of honesty also comes from there.

There's usually some kind of vocal collaboration on your albums… who sings on "Jump the fault time"?
Illán Arribas sings it, he was our bassist and is now the guitarist since Asier left. I've always liked having songs where I'm not always the one singing, we do that on several songs across our albums. On this occasion, the thing is that Illán wrote the song, I liked it and I told him: "If you're writing the lyrics, you'd better sing them yourself, because you're going to understand them better than me, since I have to interpret what you've written".

Speaking of vocal collaborations, I can't help mentioning your spectacular collaboration with Bourbon on their song "Devastación", haven't you talked about Raúl returning the favour?
Fuck, that's true…

I think the song is fucking amazing. I absolutely love Bourbon, I think they're one of the best bands in this country.
Bourbon are the fucking masters, they're fucking amazing. I admire them enormously and I think they're incredible.

Have you never thought about having Raúl sing a song with you at some point? He's not crazy about singing in English, though. Or on guitar, because fuck, he can play.
The truth is that it's complicated, because we usually record abroad and then do the arrangements here. But look, I like the idea, I'm going to suggest it to him for the next album. And "Devastación" made me really happy, because they're a band I absolutely love. We've played a lot with them and, man, they give me goosebumps.

They're the ones who told me it's hard to bring you guys down. (Laughter)
Look, when we went to present "Sewed With Light", we had them come over. But because I had the infection, I was really fucked up and we had to cancel the concert, but we kept our commitment to having them come over. And when we finally did it, we paid for everything, their accommodation and everything… it would have been a crime for them not to come. And of course, when the people who didn't know them discovered them as our support act, they went crazy.

You can't fucking listen to something like that without your balls dropping.
Absolutely. People were blown away and said, "Where the fuck did you get these guys from?", and I was thinking: don't you guys listen to fucking music? These guys are fucking amazing! It's like when we've brought Amon Ra over a few times and managed to get them to play with us. We want the album release show to be something that someone who loves music, even if they doesn't know the bands, is going to enjoy. We want them to leave saying, "Fuck, what great bands".

There are people in Spain who should be known everywhere, or at least be given the consideration they deserve, like you guys, Bourbon, Moura, Green Desert Water, Jody Cash, Aitor Ochoa, La Perra Blanco, Sioqué, Néstor Pardo… Atavismo or Pow Pow Pows back in the day…
We're bands that don't get much promotion. An interviewer, who is also a friend, told me that he kind of wished we had been a more international band, that we had played more, even abroad. And I said that maybe we played more or less, but we're small bands, we've never spent money on promotion, we've never done any promotion, so it's difficult for us to reach a lot of people, especially at the level we operate at, which is the underground. People who haven't happened to see us at a concert, people who are going to read about us now in your magazine… not much more. I also understand that we're not bands that are easy to discover. The other day we were



Jony and Javistone many years ago, after a concert in Jerez.

playing in Vitoria, and I can tell you that we're prophets in our own land and that's great, but then we played a warm-up show in a bar, in the centre of Euskadi, in a retirees' club, and loads of people came. Some of them were saying, "But how come we don't know you?"… Fuck, you're thirty kilometres away from here, how come you don't know us? We already have seven albums!

That could be the subject of another long conversation, Jony.

I'll be honest with you, whenever we've tried to do promotion, people have tried to take as much advantage as possible. They've asked us for amounts where you think… mate, with that amount I can go and record somewhere in the fucking middle of nowhere. I remember that some really cool people, contributors to Radio 3 programmes, asked us for as much as six thousand euros to get us played on Radio 3. Come on! That's outrageous, and a disgrace. Especially coming from a public broadcaster. No wonder so many artists don't want to play their game. With that money I can go to London and record a fucking great album. Imagine, that's what "Ítaca" cost us, six thousand euros.

It makes sense now that there's so much reggaeton on Radio 3 and it's always the same artists. It all adds up.

Yeah, it's horrible, isn't it?

Well, this isn't Radio 3, but hey, you're going to be on the cover of Rock Bottom Magazine. (Laughter)

It makes us very proud and we're really happy about it, Javi, and I really appreciate it.

Jony, thank you so much, and I hope everything goes brilliantly for you with this album and with all the ones that are still to come.

Javistone

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KEEP THE SOUL ALiVE

BY JL. CRESPO ZEPiSOUL

The Golden Torch



Along with The Twisted Wheel, Blackpool Mecca, The Catacombs and Wigan Casino, 'The Torch' formed part of the backbone of the clubs where northern soul developed, what I call 'the magnificent five'. Tunstall is a town approximately an hour's drive from Manchester, in the county of Staffordshire. On one of its most central residential streets, Hose Street, The Golden Torch was founded in January 1965. A roller-skating rink was converted into an upmarket mod club by Christopher Burton, a shrewd local leisure entrepreneur. His idea was to give the club the splendour of ancient Rome, with rather bizarre architecture, marble columns, a quadriga with horses at the entrance, sculptures and spears forged into the walls, and a balcony overlooking the dance floor.

From the outset, the venue became mod territory, primarily with a programme of Motown sounds and soul standards that guaranteed the presence of Tunstall's modernist contingent. On the other hand, fights at the doors of the venue were frequent, both with their main enemies (rockers) and with other gangs from the town. Two years after its opening, the musical selection changed with the arrival of Keith Minshull and his colleague Colin Curtis, known as The Kingspinners, specialists in obscure pieces of imported black music (what is known as rare soul), who began DJing on Friday nights, creating a legion of followers who came from Birmingham, Wolverhampton and even Manchester. The Golden Torch had now become a compulsory stop for the northern crowd, many of whom were young people working in the mines or factories, who escaped from this bleak life through tobacco, alcohol and amphetamines.

Its dance floor was characterised by the deafening volume produced by its sound system, with bass that made your heart race, and by the condensation produced when the club's capacity was practically exceeded, causing drops of rusty water to fall from the ceiling onto the dancers.

It is time to cross the Atlantic and head to Mexico, specifically to the Olympic Games held there in 1968. The moment approaches to award the three athletes who took part in the 200-metre sprint: Tommie Smith (gold), Peter Norman (silver) and John Carlos (bronze) make their way to the podium. After receiving their medals, Smith and Carlos, both wearing black gloves, raise their fists while lowering their heads in protest against the slights inflicted upon their race (they were, logically, Black) and as a sign of solidarity with the civil rights of the African American people. This image became known as 'Black Power'. Chris Burton thought of adopting the clenched black fist inside a circle to represent

the unity and passion of the followers of ‘northern soul’. Shortly afterwards, he added the phrase ‘Keep the Faith’ to emphasise the spirit of all those young people who wanted to keep the faith in soul, which they regarded as a doctrine, and as a call for unity and solidarity. In this way, an emblem was created for the movement that also served as a symbol of the struggle of Black people, united by their love of black music.

I have already mentioned that one of the strongest pillars on which northern soul rested was the fervour for that obscure music, far removed from the charts, as well as the passion for all those forgotten and unknown artists, many of them already deceased, who were behind all those songs played in the clubs. Names such as Linda Jones, admired by many British soul fans and who died at the age of 27, Darrell Banks (whose tragic life was recounted in this magazine just a few months ago) or Tony Clarke (notorious as an abuser and thief) were regarded as heroes at the Golden Torch, with ‘massive hits’ such as “You Hit Me Like TNT” or “Landslide”, which literally blew up the dance floor. At the same time, labels such as OKeh Records and Ric-Tic Records enjoyed particular prominence both at the Golden Torch and at the other venues that followed. OKeh, a Chicago-based label, specialised in obscure, uptempo soul, with groups such as The Vibrations and The Triumphs and solo artists such as Major Harris and Shandi Sheldon and her iconic northern soul hit, “You’re Gonna Make Me Love You”; all of them enjoyed their moment of fame on the stages of clubs across northern England. Ric-Tic, meanwhile, from Detroit, following in Motown’s footsteps but operating completely independently, had a fabulous ability to discover new artists who went on to take on Berry Gordy Jr.’s label, particularly Edwin Starr, one of the emblematic figures of northern soul, with an explosive battery of anthems.

The Torch became a bomb about to explode at every session due to the overwhelming sound of its speakers, the habitual overcrowding that sometimes doubled its capacity, the sweat caused by the solid mass of all those ‘souls’ dancing, the consumption of alcohol outside the venue, and the disturbances caused by fights in a residential area inhabited by elderly neighbours. In short, its operation was dangerously at risk. To make matters worse, most of its regulars were underage (average age: 14/15)



and could enter freely, as there were no admission restriction. The abuse of the ‘customary’ amphetamines, which were always so prevalent in northern soul, caused genuine excesses that normally resulted in ambulances being called because of fainting and overdoses. If we add to all this the raids and inspections by the council services due to the usual blocking of emergency exits… as the saying goes, the writing was on the wall.

In November 1972, Burton, the person responsible for the venue, was summoned to a meeting with the local police team following serious disturbances at the club entrance, which had broken out after a drug check, and during which the closure of the Golden Torch was put on the table. Among the measures adopted to keep the club’s operating licence was an agreement to enforce admission control in order to prevent overcrowding and excessive capacity, with a register of all those who had been expelled for one reason or another, as well greater attention to the habitual drug dealing inside the venue. On the other hand, the emergency exits were padlocked to prevent ‘dealers’ from entering, a measure that was in complete breach of fire safety regulations. Despite the good intentions of both management and staff the feeling was that the end was dangerously close. According to Chris Burton, only five percent of the soul fans who filled the venue week after week were drug users, and there was little he could do about the incidents that took place outside The Torch. What he failed to take into account, or preferred to overlook, was that once inside, the responsibility was his.

In the spring of 1973, an application was made to renew the licence, but it was rejected by the health department and other administrative sections of the city. Residents’ associations, the local press and specialist magazines such as ‘Blues & Soul’ also portrayed the entire climate of squalor and crime surrounding the Golden Torch, which would contribute to the final decision to close it down. Despite one last opportunity, during which Burton desperately sought enough support to keep its doors open, the club closed virtually overnight, without a farewell party, bringing to an end a cycle of 18 months operating as an all-nighter and becoming a true landmark of northern soul, with a unique programme and dancers considered the best in the movement. As happened with The Twisted Wheel, although it enjoyed its reign for longer, drugs continued to be the dark and bitter side of northern soul, closing doors in their wake… The present and future of the musical and dance movement moved to the coast of Blackpool, but that is another story.

In the mid-1970s, the iconic building was destroyed by a fire that completely gutted it, leading to its demolition.

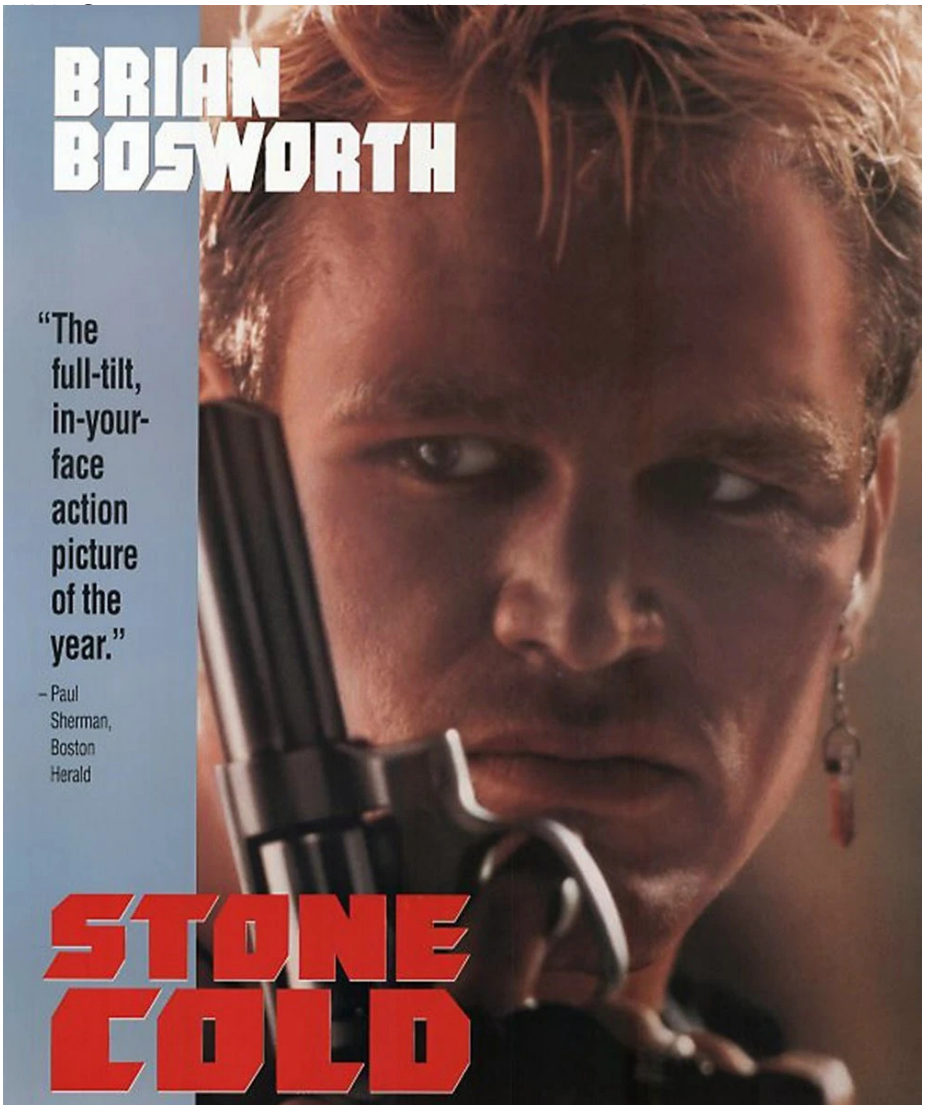
Musical selection:

Crackin’ Up Over You (Roy Hamilton, RCA Victor, 1966)

Crying Over You (Duke Browner, Impact Records, 1966)

Bok to Bach (Father’s Angels, Black Market, 1968)





I remember as if it were yesterday how, almost thirty-five years ago, my uncle Joaquín showed me a magazine featuring the latest VHS releases and pointed out this one, "Cold as Steel", telling me that it had to be fucking great simply from looking at the cover. And the truth is, he was absolutely right, he knew what I liked. We are looking at the typical early-'90s action movie, when action cinema was still drawing heavily on what had been successful during the previous decade, something that would change in the middle of the decade with Michael Bay and company. Here we have the familiar story of a tough cop who does his job his own way, following his own rules, and is assigned the mission of infiltrating a dangerous Hell's Angels brotherhood with important political connections.

The film's protagonist is Brian Bosworth, a football player at the time who decided to try his luck in the movie business, this being his debut. Shortly beforehand, Bosworth had suffered a serious injury that abruptly forced him out of the sport, a retirement that left him quite depressed during the shoot. As a side note, he played three seasons for the NFL's Seattle Seahawks. We are looking at the usual muscle-bound tough guy beating the shit out of everyone, although the former football player stated that he did not want to be the next Stallone and, in fact, the lukewarm reaction from audiences and the reviews from the specialised press meant that his career never really went anywhere, subsequently making third- or fourth-rate movies. In time, Brian Bosworth would become a sports commentator and appear on the typical family-oriented shows on American TV. By the way, Bosworth was a hands-on kind of guy and performed almost all of his own action scenes.

As we were saying, the movie failed to take off despite the promotional push behind it. With a budget of 25 million, it only grossed 9 million, so the possibility then being considered of making a sequel disappeared overnight. As a curiosity, it is worth mentioning that the film was produced by Michael Douglas, who asked for his name to be left out of the credits so as not to be associated with it. The original production idea was to have Schwarzenegger as the lead, but when he asked for 20 million, he was automatically ruled out.

When it comes to directing, we have a man I have always had a great deal of affection for, Craig R. Baxley, someone who started out as a stuntman and ended up becoming a stunt coordinator and eventually a director. In fact, during the '80s, it was common to see his name in the credits of episodes of "The A-Team", where, besides working on the stunt sequences, he directed quite a few episodes, some of the best ones, by the way. Baxley replaced Bruce Malmuth, who was fired for getting into fights with anyone on the set who did not do what he said. I do not want to finish mentioning Baxley without bringing up two other highly enjoyable movies from those days, "Dark Angel" and "Action Jackson".

The rest of the cast features plenty of familiar faces. Among the biker gang, we can see an unhinged Lance Henriksen as the ultimate bad guy, giving one of the most over-the-top performances he is remembered for, complete with a priceless look we had never seen before. Henriksen himself wrote all of his dialogue. Also within the brotherhood, we had the ever-reliable William Forsythe, playing the villain's right-hand man. Forsythe was shooting this film at the same time as "Justice in the City" and even stated that the first script he read for this movie was the worst he had ever seen in his life. In the role of the girl, we have the beautiful Arabella Holzbog.
As for the soundtrack, as you would expect, there is plenty of rock, with tracks by The Doobie Brothers, Wire Train, Eleine's Treehouse, Sheryl Crow, Saigon Kick and Cryer, who even appeared in the film.

You know the drill, if you like biker movies, girls in leather and tattoos, rock, cars flying through the air, bursts of machine-gun fire… this is your movie. Otherwise, stay well away.

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The Black-Suited Ladies: classic rock with young blood



With a single EP, The Black-Suited Ladies have managed to catch the attention of the person writing these lines. These three guys come from Badajoz with tremendous enthusiasm and a sound that draws from many of the bands we love around here, a classic sound from people who have listened to everyone from classics such as Queen to Mammoth. We met them at the much-mentioned 6 Grupos 6 competition in this issue, and Lucas, Dani and Gonzalo show that they are serious about what they do, demonstrating tons of passion in their music. We talked about their experience in the competition, their beginnings, our beloved Rack Roll & the Remayteds and even… Jodorowsky!

For those who don't know you, tell us, how did The Black-Suited Ladies come together?
The band was formed in 2020, when singer and guitarist Lucas Sáenz and Dani Martínez, our former bassist, started making music casually and decided to look for a drummer to complete the lineup, and that's when David Lledó came in. For almost two years now, we have had Gonzalo Hidalgo as our new bassist.

Why the name? It has a rock 'n' roll, classy and even sensual feel to it. Does it have any particular meaning behind it, or did it simply sound the way you wanted the band to sound?
The name comes from a painting that was in David's, the drummer's, house. The name is heavily influenced by '70s rock bands, seeking from the very beginning a somewhat darker, provocative and sensual aesthetic. From the start, we created different characters to shape a fantasy world that served as an analogy for our personal experiences (once again influenced by the magic and attraction generated by the most renowned concept albums in '70s rock).



Your sound is guitar-driven and rock-oriented, with doses of '90s melody… how would you define your sound?
We define our sound as a renewal of the classic sound, drawing heavily on the music of a few decades ago while adding a hard-hitting, eclectic and fresh touch with more contemporary sounds. The idea is to try to modernize the music we have always enjoyed, giving it a more current approach in order to develop our own identity and connect with younger audiences.

Which artists or albums do you feel have had the greatest influence on the way you compose?
It varies depending on the period. When we started, our main influences were bands such as Queen, Wings and Greta Van Fleet. Nowadays, I'd say there are a lot of different kinds of influences. Above all, we look to a lot of current bands such as Mammoth, The Warning, South Arcade, Aurora…

We met at 6 Grupos 6 and you left us with a great impression, although unfortunately you didn't make it to the final. How was the experience? What did you think of what you saw?
It was a lot of fun. It was the first time we had taken part, and we didn't know what to expect. It was quite a chaotic trip because we didn't have cars or vans, so we had to make do with buses, taxis and BlaBlaCar to get around with all our equipment in tow. Even so, and despite not making it to the final, it was an experience that left all of us with a very good feeling: we were treated better than at home, we met some very interesting people and, above all, we had the opportunity to discover new young bands from across the country, with a lot of talent and a great variety of styles. It's reassuring to see that there are still places where there is a clear interest in supporting culture and emerging bands.

There was something that caught our attention: you were among the few participants who stayed to watch the performances by the other bands. Years ago, that was quite common, and now it seems to be less frequent. Do you think some of that camaraderie between bands has been lost, or have the dynamics simply changed?
In our case, it was something that came naturally. We were in a place where we felt very welcome from the very beginning, with many friends we were making along the way, and supporting bands is something we always like to do selflessly because it's something we genuinely enjoy. Most emerging bands are made up of young people dealing with very similar problems, so we think it's nice to support one another and offer whatever help we can so that we can keep moving forward. As for the rest, well, there's a bit of everything. We've had bad experiences with other bands, mainly because of jealousy and ego, but fortunately, most of the time, our experiences have been good.

I really liked the fact that in your live shows you combine a powerful sound with good melodies. Perhaps the vocals sound stronger live, but that's just my personal impression. Since recording the EP, have you felt that your way of playing has evolved?
Aside from the natural experience you gain from playing concerts, there have also been changes in the way we prepare our live shows, trying to connect more with the audience, getting them involved in some way so they can experience it from the inside (it's difficult to connect with people in Spain when you're singing in English). On the other hand, new influences come in on a musical level, leading us to write different songs that help define the sound, along with changes in equipment, different outfits and image…

Of your only release to date, the self-titled EP, there's one song I really like, "Mother". What can you tell us about that song?
I'll answer this one myself (Lucas). The song has a beautiful story connected to a place that means a lot to me. Songs can come to you in very different ways, sometimes when you least expect them. This was one of those moments of divine inspiration. In this case, the song came to me one summer night in Calpe, a town in Alicante. I was feeling quite inspired at the time, so I bought a notebook and a pen and sat down beneath a small lighthouse in the harbor. There, watching the boats, the fishermen, the lights reflecting on the water and the waves breaking, the song came to me as if I were remembering a melody I had forgotten years ago. I didn't need any instrument because I could hear the song clearly in my head. I wrote the lyrics and the chords, and recorded the melody on my phone so I wouldn't forget it, and after two rehearsals, the song was already put together.

I'll admit that when you announced that you were going to play "Mother", I got really excited thinking it would be a cover of the famous Glenn Danzig song… but I'm not complaining, yours is a great song. Do you know of any other songs titled "Mother"? Pink Floyd, John Lennon, IDLES… Was there any particular one you had in mind?



Yes, in fact, there was a time when we thought about changing the name so it wouldn't be the same as all of these, but none of the alternatives fit better than "Mother". It even came close to being called Mother Earth, but we also realized that title already existed (a song by Emitt Rhodes), so we simply left it as "Mother".

Earlier I said that you have a predominantly rock-oriented, very '90s sound, but you also have more pop-oriented compositions such as "Before Goodbye" that work perfectly within the whole, giving you a more epic edge and adding depth to your sound. What can you tell us about this song?
That's one of the songs that reflects our more experimental side, which is actually the side we enjoy the most. Right now we're trying to find a balance between more commercial songs and others that are more alternative, which creates a fairly eclectic repertoire and helps us gradually define a sound that sets us apart from the rest of the bands. As for the subject of the song, it's inspired by the documentary about "Dune", the film that Alejandro Jodorowsky never got to make. Although this isn't the only time we've found inspiration in Jodorowsky's work: the song "Real Life", which is also part of the first EP, is influenced by the film "The Holy Mountain".

You're from Badajoz. Is there any kind of scene there? Which bands or artists would you recommend?
There are quite a few bands in Badajoz with very diverse styles, although there is a lack of institutional support in terms of venues, concerts, promotion, financial aid… On the other hand, we ourselves are part of other bands from the city such as Veora, Ley Cero and Sacamanteka. Apart from these, other bands we recommend are Whatever!, Heiser, Rack Roll & the Remayteds and Natacha.

Your EP came out in early 2025. What plans do you have for the short and medium term?
Right now we're finishing the recordings for our second EP, which consists of another five new songs, so the work now will mainly be promotion. We'd like to accompany the songs with plenty of visual content: videos, photos, music videos, visualizers… And, of course, keep presenting the band through different opportunities such as the one offered by 6 Grupos 6.

Javistone





In a world as saturated as the superhero genre, the animated movies about the young web-slinger Miles Morales that began in 2018 came as a breath of fresh air that we all appreciated. Beyond their impeccable production values and solid script, "Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse" and "Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse", adaptations of the Spider-Verse comic-book line, used the multiverse (a device that, let's admit it, has smelled pretty stale in Marvel movies for quite some time now) to bring together an endless array of versions of the famous web-slinger: there was a spider-pig, we had the fearless Spider-Gwen, the futuristic Spider-Man 2099, the anime-style Parker… There was even Pavitr Prabhakar, the Indian Spider-Man. But only one caught my attention, the only one among all those bizarre Parkers who appeared in black and white: Spider-Noir.

The series originated with "Spider-Man Noir #1", published in 2009 as part of the Marvel Noir line, created by David Hine, Fabrice Sapolsky and Carmine Di Giandomenico. The idea came from Sapolsky, who proposed bringing Spider-Man into the world of pulp magazines and classic film noir. The fundamental difference is that here Peter Parker does not live in the usual superhero world, but in New York in the mid-1930s, in the midst of the Great Depression, and the city is dominated by political corruption, organized crime, poverty and violence. There is no trace here of the carefree Peter Parker we all know, but rather a deliberately adult, pulp reinterpretation of Spider-Man.

However, this "Spider-Noir" series does not draw directly from the comic. In the comics, it is a spider from a shipment whose origins lie in ancient Egypt that gives him his powers, whereas in the series, his powers and those of the supervillains he faces are the result of experiments carried out on them by the Nazis in Germany. The Parker played by a formidable Nicolas Cage (if you can think of a better adjective, please use it, he deserves it) is called Ben Reilly here, a former sergeant who fought in World War II and, upon returning home, takes up private investigation with more alcohol than success. New York, private detectives, gangsters, corruption, violence, cigarette smoke and characters who seem to have gone several decades without trusting anyone too much. "Spider-Noir" does not simply put a hat and trench coat on Spider-Man. The series understands that noir has its own rules and uses them to transform the character. Here we find a much darker, lonelier and more disillusioned protagonist, marked by guilt and by a kind of violence that has little to do with the Peter Parker we are used to seeing.



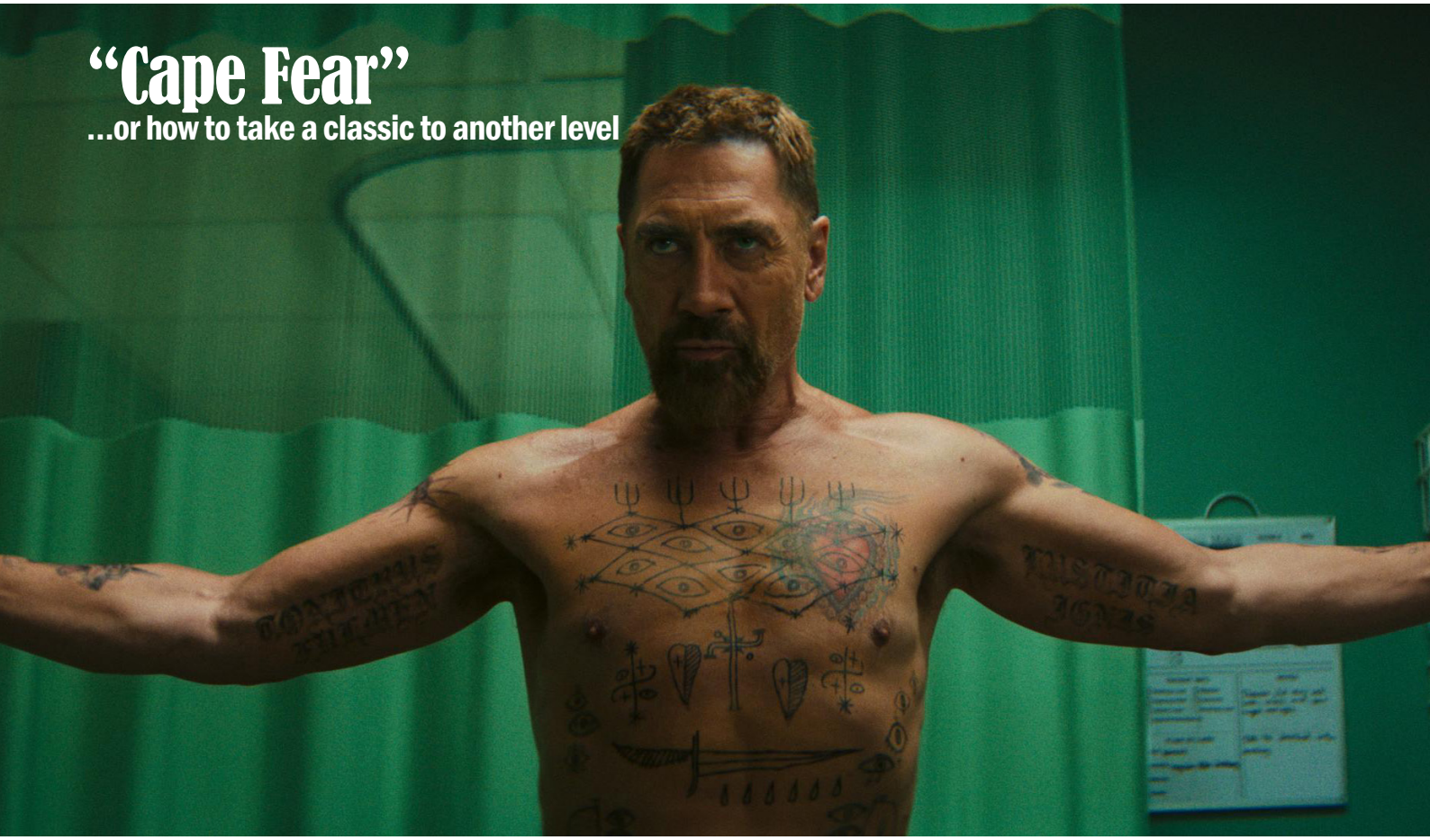
Visually, "Spider-Noir" is more than a noteworthy production. The remarkable fact that you have the option of watching it in black and white or in color is certainly not something you see every day. Superheroes in black and white? Superheroes in black and white. The cinematography, the shadow-filled interiors, the alleyways, the clubs, that dirty and threatening New York… all successfully recreate the spirit of the genre. It is not exactly a revolutionary stylistic proposition, but the combination undoubtedly works.

And then there is Nicolas Cage, who seems to have been born to play this character. His Ben Reilly is a detective who is completely unhinged, as he could hardly be anything else (does Cage choose disturbed characters, or does he make them disturbed?), with a perfectly controlled mixture of cynicism, melancholy and madness. Cage plays with excess, but he does so with the understanding that this is precisely where much of the fun lies. At times he seems to be playing a 1930s detective, a superhero and Nicolas Cage all at once. And, as I said, it works. There are moments when the story is more conventional than you might expect and seems to lose some of its charm (especially when the supervillains appear on screen), but that is insignificant in the overall picture. A Spider-Man closer to Dick Tracy than Peter Parker. And with Nazis, Jesse, I'll leave it there.

Javistone

“Cape Fear”

...or how to take a classic to another level



No one expected this at this point, after two existing versions, two classics belonging to very different eras, but both great films. And yet, the truth is that the arrival of the “Cape Fear” series on Apple TV+ has brought John D. MacDonald’s 1957 novel “The Executioners” back into the spotlight, giving the book another twist, expanding it, adding nuances and, in a way, updating it for our time. A series featuring Spanish actor Javier Bardem as its main attraction, a Bardem who already demonstrated the brutal intensity of his acting in legendary roles such as Anton Chigurh in “No Country for Old Men” (2007), for which he won the Oscar for Best Supporting Actor, an intensity that here he manages to take to the absolute extreme. Because if this 2026 “Cape Fear” makes your skin crawl, it is above all thanks to the Spanish actor.

As I mentioned earlier, the “Cape Fear” adaptations are based on John D. MacDonald’s novel “The Executioners”, which four years after its publication was brought to the big screen by J. Lee Thompson in one of those great classics of cinema, alongside two immortal giants such as Gregory Peck (Sam Bowden, the lawyer) and Robert Mitchum (ex-convict Max Cady). This version, a product of its time, conveys fear, terror, hatred… without showing them. Thompson manages to make us feel the anguish without barely making it visible. What else could you expect when you have an iconic performance from someone like Mitchum, capable of freezing our blood with performances such as that of Reverend Harry Powell in Charles Laughton’s “The Night of the Hunter” (1955). Just remembering those knuckles tattooed with Love/Hate is enough to make it impossible not to feel a shiver run through your entire body. This “Cape Fear” is a brilliant, restrained classic thriller thanks to its sober and progressively claustrophobic direction.



The second version came from Martin Scorsese in 1991, and there is no small matter about that. Just as Thompson’s 1962 version was a product of its time, this one could be no different. This “Cape Fear” is visually and stylistically very close to films from that era, movies such as “Reservoir Dogs” (1992) and “Pulp Fiction” (1994), directed by Quentin Tarantino, or “True Romance”, written by him and directed by Tony Scott; “King of New York” (1990) and “Bad Lieutenant” (1992), by Abel Ferrara, or “Casino” (1995), by Scorsese himself. In fact, the Italian-American director had just made one of his great classics, “Goodfellas” (1990), in which he once again worked with Robert De Niro, a De Niro in absolutely top form. And… who the hell could possibly step into the shoes of Robert Mitchum and go even further? The 1991 “Cape Fear” is indeed much more violent than its predecessor, and the sexual component that began to emerge in the 1990s is present, along with another, much more disturbing kind of violence in which the fragility of a minor is shattered to pieces. And Scorsese turns the ex-convict’s seduction into a form of psychological and terribly toxic intimidation. Cady does not even need to touch Danielle to invade her privacy. He does it through words, and that is enough to disturb that girl whose innocence is gradually being shattered. Here, the focus is undoubtedly on De Niro, beyond the fact that Nick Nolte, as Sam Bowden, proves incapable of keeping up with him. Once again, an absolute classic that took the original story much further, adding nuances and updates in keeping with its time.

And now, in 2026, what do we have? Well, a world where Trump exists (with everything it entails for a society to have elevated such a pile of shit to the highest office twice in the United States), violence has skyrocketed, technology and social media have muddied everything (I thought about saying “shitted everything up”, but it seemed a little too crude)… and society is completely unhinged. It was inevitable that this Max Cady would be excessive and completely unhinged. That is precisely what Javier Bardem delivers, an absolutely extreme and deranged performance in the form of a ten-episode series on the platform from the apple company.

The “Cape Fear” version created by Nick Antosca and starring Amy Adams and Patrick Wilson



alongside Bardem is a web of secrets, personal conflicts, enigmatic backgrounds, voodoo and plenty of violence. But above all, anxiety: it is impossible not to feel it in the first episodes, as the man from Madrid gradually reveals himself to the world. No matter how calculated his plan may be, it is fascinating how Bardem grabs you by the gut and, despite knowing the story, manages to make you barely breathe in every scene in which he takes over the screen. Because he does, he takes it over with that half-smile and his gaze of a psychopath on the verge of exploding.

Argument-wise, it occasionally loses steam, which is inevitable if you want to tell a story that had already been told in two-hour films and now stretch it out to ten episodes. The excessive runtime forces the introduction of countless details that twist the story we already know. Cady's target is no longer a lawyer, but a female lawyer, meaning that the sexual component is added to the time bomb, because the fucking Bardem oozes charisma and sexuality from every pore of his skin. He is equally frightening and attractive. The truth is that neither Amy Adams nor Patrick Wilson comes anywhere close to matching him in any scene they share. Adams comes across as insecure, while Wilson lacks tons of charisma just to be able to look Bardem in the eye as an equal. But, of course, the plot works. As I said before, the half-truths, enigmas, silences and use of technology make this "Cape Fear" much more frenetic at times, especially when you see the family's children losing their minds (metaphorically) or losing parts of their limbs (literally). Furthermore, Bardem imitates neither De Niro nor Mitchum. I would say he absorbs them and takes them much further. Bardem knows how to be threatening without having to raise his voice, but also when he needs to demonstrate his physical brutality and his lack of scruples to achieve his goals.

Perhaps the series loses some consistency due to such an excessive runtime. There are moments when somewhat confusing storylines, together with a decline in the intensity of Cady's character and some somewhat forced twists, cause this "Cape Fear" to lose that wildly excessive intensity of the early episodes during the final third of the season, but the overall result is undoubtedly outstanding.

In short, if Thompson turned "Cape Fear" into a thriller and Scorsese turned it into a nightmare, Apple TV+ and Javier Bardem raised the stakes.

Javistone





It is impossible not to fall under Dedra Meero's "charms" from the moment she first appears in "Andor", that masterpiece Disney gave us to restore some grandeur to the battered Star Wars saga. A ruthless social climber with absolutely no scruples, wearing an expression of infinite disgust as if she could smell shit nearby without knowing where it was coming from, and who turns that into her constant emotional state: "I smell shit". If "Andor" has one virtue, and it has many, it is that it shows the true horror of the Galactic Empire.

The real terror does not come from the Sith's shitty abilities, although those too, of course, because who likes having their neck broken from a distance… but from a dictatorial system that rests on another system in which bureaucracy, order above all else, control and a total absence of empathy prevail. Meero perfectly embodies that system: there are no emotions, there is only work, only orders to follow and the goal of maintaining order above anything else. That is why the rebellion is so unbearable to her, she cannot stand the existence of something she does not understand, much less something she cannot control. She is an intelligent, disciplined and competent person who has put all those virtues at the service of something monstrous. And that is always more frightening and disgusting than the violence itself, while at the same time being tremendously attractive. Dedra believes she is on the right side of history, dignified in her role as a proud cog in the Imperial machine. The small detail is that she works for a regime that tortures, murders and turns repression into paperwork. But, hey, someone has to maintain order. And that is the best thing about the character: Dedra does not seem to particularly enjoy hurting people. It is worse: she considers it part of the job. Violence, when accompanied by a uniform and a well-written report, seems to be much easier to stomach. And if she has to use poor Syril Karn (something resembling a couple that she will never have) as a pawn, she will, of course. They also share a particular concept of love, one they could easily mistake for a human resources audit.

Dedra is still a fascist bitch (redundant, I know) who has no qualms about destroying lives if it means following orders and the established plan, a plan, of course, that she does not question because, as a good fascist, she does not question orders, she simply follows them. Every time Dedra carries out orders, knowing how unpleasant her task is but without questioning them, I could not help but remember the scene from "Pan's Labyrinth" ("El Laberinto del Fauno") which Captain Vidal asks the doctor, played by Alex Angulo, why he had euthanized a prisoner whom Vidal was torturing after having ordered him to keep him alive. Angulo's character replied: "Obeying without thinking, just because... That is something only people like you do, Captain", after which he was immediately executed by the officer. That is Dedra, a soulless being without empathy.

The formidable Denise Gough, the actress who portrays her brilliantly, reflected on the character: "I think about Dedra a lot lately. A fascist. A henchwoman. She thinks she's in charge of everything. A dangerous combination. I will always be grateful to Tony for giving her the ending she deserved. Let's hope art can imitate life. And soon".

Javistone



“The Invite”

Independent cinema is an incredibly broad spectrum, encompassing countless adaptations: of books, video games or other films. In this case, completely unexpectedly, an adaptation of one of those shabby Spanish comedies made for the sole purpose of making money has managed to rank among the best films of 2026. And in a country like ours, which has been a creative benchmark for centuries, it is a shame to see our ideas being perfected elsewhere because of the lack of narrative quality in the most commercial films. At least we now have a reference for what it would be like to reach our artistic potential, because “The Invite” is fantastic and will deserve to be part of the conversations surrounding the major awards this year.

Olivia Wilde is the great actress and director pulling the strings of this film. Wilde took her pseudonym thanks to the great inspiration that the British writer Oscar Wilde was to her in her youth. In fact, at the beginning she includes a brilliant quote of his to introduce one of the main ideas: “One should always be in love. That is why one should never marry.” And after making the forgettable “Don’t Worry Darling”, Olivia gets serious and assembles a great cast to bring that idea to the screen. As the lead, she shares the spotlight with the recently successful Seth Rogen. But not just him, as the other two characters are the already legendary Edward Norton and the brilliant Penélope Cruz, who turns out to be the best thing about the entire film, alongside the director’s spectacular camerawork.

“The Invite” takes the progressive deterioration of marital relationships as its central premise. Through its magnificent screenplay, it builds, block by block, the troubled core of a marriage on the verge of breaking apart, resulting in two completely organic protagonists who manage to draw you fully into their conflict. The key lies in the development of this conflict. Using the other two protagonists as catalysts, incredibly rich narrative situations arise that further fuel the argument, which is made up of the issues that permeate a marriage, such as the past, effort and, in a very incidental way, desire. All of this takes us on a journey of absolute cinematic fluidity that concludes with a hopeful and wonderful reflection on the way we relate to one another and how that evolves over time. Beautiful.

After the great box-office year we are having, we cannot forget those films that are not major commercial successes but are great artistic achievements. That is why I like to reflect on the nonexistent relationship between popularity and quality. And the truth is that we are lucky that many of this year’s major popular films are genuinely good. Through them, we manage to get people who do not normally do so to take some time to discuss, think and enjoy something that always enriches us: well-crafted art. That is also why I regret that a large proportion of moviegoers never end up seeing films like this, which can often completely change your perspective, but anyway, let those of us fortunate enough to enjoy them make the most of it. But let us always try to spread the word about our beloved seventh art, because, for some of us, it is one of the driving forces of our lives, and sharing it means sharing a part of ourselves.

Francisco La Rubia

“Obsession”

Among the wide variety of projects we have seen this year, there are a couple of films with a common characteristic that really stand out. And the fact is that, just a few years ago, it would have seemed crazy to think that two of the year’s highest-grossing films would come from young directors, and even crazier that they would be directors who got their start on YouTube. The great entertainment platform can be seen as a source of money for a lot of easy content, but fortunately, because it is such a massive point of exposure to the public, we also find great artists looking to bring their art to the world, and that is the case with Curry Barker.

A few years ago, Barker received an offer for one of his projects, this time taking it a step beyond the kind of films he had made on YouTube. This time it was financed by several production companies of a much greater caliber than those behind his previous films. Although the budget was what you would expect for a production like this, it was around $750,000. If we could tell the Barker who received that idea at the time how far it would go, he would not believe it in a thousand years. Its phenomenon has gone massively viral on social media over the past few months, and at the box office it has broken historical records: it is the highest-grossing film ever made for less than a million dollars, reaching more than $400 million. When we see something this popular, those of us who are more skeptical of the general public’s opinion, like me, wonder whether it is an artistic phenomenon



or simply the ridiculous magic of scrolling through TikTok. However, we knew what we were dealing with, because it was not only the general public that received the film well, but critics in all those countries that were able to see it before us in Spain were placing it among the elite of horror films of recent years. The genre, just like Spanish cinema, is commercially dominated by soulless films that try to make money. That is why its true essence lies in films like this, films that make you think for days. Because yes, my expectations were completely surpassed. “Obsession” is one of the most complex horror films of the last decade. With a screenplay of the kind we rarely see, Barker presents us with what appears to be a simple premise, but as it progresses, he builds up numerous thematic threads and brings them all together in a completely perfect ending, making it my favorite film of the year so far.

The film stands out for the variety of its subject matter, including its treatment of contemporary relationships. It shows us how, in a superficial society in which we seek stimulation and the easy path to obtaining what we crave, many relationships have mutated into little more than matters of image or desire, with personal satisfaction taking priority over making things work together. It is in this context that Barker presents us with a plot in which an apparently ordinary guy uses a mystical power to get what he wants without having to make any effort. The consequences of this are incredibly powerful on a narrative level, because without ordinary human nature, everything becomes completely unnatural and extreme, giving way to gore and horror as a form of representation. Our protagonist, who initially seemed like an innocent kid, transforms into someone detestable who acts solely to satisfy his desire, ignoring everything else. And that is precisely what adds even more complexity. The film creates a new conceptual layer by connecting this extreme selfishness with something that shares those same characteristics: rape. I think this concept is the best represented in the film, because many people live so deeply trapped within their own perspective that they completely ignore what others might feel or think. By connecting these two major critical strands discussed above, the film constructs a fantastic argument, building the character of Bear as a perfect reflection of many of the things that are wrong with the contemporary world.

Beyond the strength of its message, the film stands out cinematographically in a very surprising way considering the low budget they had to work with. When it comes to making good genre cinema, technique and originality are essential to creating something fresh, and in this case the team achieves genuine wonders through the use of lighting and makeup. I have two of the most terrifying scenes I have ever seen burned into my mind: one in which the protagonist is standing at the door of the house and we can only make out her dark silhouette with her glowing eyes, and another in which she appears in the corner of the room, with her face completely distorted. These small visual details are what create true terror and build a character who is frightening simply because of her presence. And that character, and probably the film itself, would be nothing without Inde Navarrete’s incredible performance. An unknown girl who used to stream to pay off her debts and who, within a few months, has become a global star. Her performance is something difficult to match: she embodies the character with levels of facial and physical expressiveness that are rarely seen on screen. Simply spectacular and, to me, Oscar-worthy.

Films like this demonstrate the greatness of art as one of the fundamental pillars of our society on a cultural level. The fact that films like these allow us to see situations from other points of view, especially for those who are not accustomed to doing so, is something very positive, particularly because films involving magical wishes that never take other people’s will into account have become normalized. That is why being able to enjoy content like this is so valuable, because there are times when films teach us more values than educators themselves. Many times, it is not until we see the consequences of certain actions that we truly come to understand them, and cinema can be a powerful way of anticipating reality and helping us develop as people.

Francisco La Rubia



“The Odyssey”



Homer’s poem, the sequel to the Iliad, the epic story of Odysseus and Christopher Nolan’s new film. The ambition of one of the greatest directors of our century has led him to adapt one of the most epic adventures of all time, and that ambition has led him to achieve his greatest box-office success, proving that there are still artists with an incredibly loyal fandom. That said, part of this boom is due to the major contribution of social media lately. Although they are not exactly my cup of tea when it comes to artistic matters, in cases like this they manage to attract a large audience that, for better or worse, helps make the film’s name even bigger. And although “The Odyssey” could hardly be made any bigger than it already is, Nolan’s version offers us a very interesting proposition that is going to give people plenty to talk about this year.

Completely engulfed in controversy from the very beginning: the format, the cast, adapting such an important work… This version of Odysseus’s return to Ithaca had a lot to prove upon its release. In the end, it managed to silence some of its critics, but not in other areas. Regarding the cast, Elliot Page and Lupita Nyong’o have received criticism from the usual suspects who cannot accept that a 2026 adaptation can be multicultural. To their misfortune, both deliver great performances, proving that they can take on roles beyond those defined by their race or gender. The rest of the actors are incredible, with the great Robert Pattinson and Samantha Morton standing out, the latter probably receiving a nomination for Best Supporting Actress.

As for the adaptation, it serves Nolan’s story incredibly well. However, the doubts surrounding the adaptation were more related to the sheer scale of the book, given how rich it is in content. This is where the film can fall somewhat short, since it seeks to tell Odysseus’s story rather than develop the other narrative threads. On the other hand, I also have to agree with some people, such as the great Alejandro Calvo, regarding the film’s format. It is truly impressive to see, if you are lucky enough to do so. It uses the extremely exclusive 70 mm IMAX format, which is only available in forty cinemas around the world. The rest of us mere mortals have to settle for seeing 70% of what is shown on screen, making it an extremely elitist decision.

Leaving all these discussions aside, the final result is excellent and, without a doubt, one of the great films of the 2026 season.

On a narrative level, the film is fascinating. Nolan manages to bring us some wonderful sequences, which stand out for the way they generate terror. The great director’s versatility manages to put scenes on screen that create a dark tension that is the film’s main protagonist. The brilliance of that sombre screenplay, written by the director himself, lies in the way he guides Odysseus’s stories towards the meaning of the film, perfectly synchronising the hero’s story with the weight of its message. Following the perfect “Oppenheimer”, “The Odyssey” seeks to be its narrative continuation. Nolan shows us how he sees the world, filled with war, and through the story of Homer’s characters, he perfectly fits what he wanted to convey. The decline of that ancient world, made up of stable civilisations, comes about through the stupid decisions of its leaders. This leads innocent people to become participants in those wars, in their savagery, fury and rage, bringing about the total loss of human wisdom and a setback for society.

That is what causes Odysseus’s journey to be stained with blood and, even though he achieves his goals, he pays a very high price. For this reason, Nolan delivers us a hopeful message, encouraging us to try to do good whenever possible, accepting the conflicts of the world without giving up the fight for a better one.

Adapting such complex and extensive material was very difficult, even for a director of the American’s stature. For that reason, the flaws I have mentioned are overshadowed by his great achievement and, above all, by the incredible immersive experience you are plunged into while watching it. Alongside that, seeing so many people going to the cinema to watch it and witnessing how art and culture continue to move so many people is a beautiful feeling that makes everything surrounding it even greater.

That is where the director’s great importance lies. He manages to achieve wonderful things and, hopefully, amid all that excellence, he will find some time to learn how to write female characters in his next film.

Francisco La Rubia

The Surroyal



“Humour isn’t something we seek out, but rather a consequence of who we are and how we process things. We can understand why people perceive that in us and, although it’s not intentional, we don’t mind that being the case. In fact, we like it.”

It has become something of a tradition for the September issues of Rock Bottom Magazine to be filled with references to 6 Grupos 6, and this one could be no different. The level was fantastic, but, as always, there are some bands that win you over, and they do it instantly. It was tremendous to see these guys take the stage and tear everything apart in barely twenty minutes. Authentic delirious pop-rock, with a breakneck rhythm, an absolute party attitude… a spectacle for the ears and the eyes. It had been a long time since I’d had so much fun at a concert. From San José de la Rinconada, Seville, come The Surroyal, a band that has made rock, pop and unrestrained energy a fundamental part of its identity.

After two EPs, their first album, “Daydreaming Shalalala Circus”, represents a step forward for four friends who started out rehearsing in a garage and now have a very clear idea of what they want to do. Queen, Wet Leg, Viagra Boys, The Beatles, Oasis and Blur are among their influences, although to me they brought to mind an early version of Foxy Shazam (they admitted they didn’t know them, but no doubt once they hear them, they’ll understand my reference). The Surroyal have managed to build a sound of their own, as eclectic as their stage presence. We talked to them about their evolution, their songs, live shows, singing in English, the Seville scene and their plans to take their music much further.

Tell us, how did the band come together? You’re all from San José de la Rinconada, Seville, right?
The band was formed by Ian and Josema. As silly as it may sound, it started like the typical story where a bunch of high school kids want to start a band. Josema asked Ángel to join because they had known each other since they were kids. Later, Ian got in touch with Gus through a mutual friend. From then on, we started rehearsing together in Gus’s garage. What started out as four friends having fun is now a serious project where four friends are still having fun. We recorded our album “Daydreaming Shalalala Circus” in that same garage, and it was entirely composed and produced by us.

We have a curiosity: what does “Surroyal” mean?
The Surroyal means whatever each person wants it to mean. We know that in some countries people greet each other by saying “surroyal”. In others, they say “salut”. The truth is, we were looking for a word that contained “royal”, that sounded good, and we came up with this one.

I’m not going to say anything about having nicknames, my mother goes crazy because I have one for everything I do, but you have to explain yours to me, if they can be published: Agustín is Gus Bernal; Sergio is Ian Mystery; Ángel is McBeetles. Josema has made things less complicated, but even so, he replaced the original Gil with Guirao. Where do they come from?
McBeetles is Ángel, but his real name is Ian Mystery. Since that name was already taken, he went with McBeetles, even though Gus was already called that, so he took Josema’s Bernal and kept it for himself. It’s true that Josema hasn’t taken much of a risk, but don’t mistake a crushing sobriety for his natural modesty. Ian Mystery is Sergio, but deep down Gus Bernal doesn’t accept it. I suppose that’s why Josema thought about it for so long, and McBeetles ended up being Ángel.

I imagine you have a much clearer idea now of who you are as a band. How do you see the evolution between your two EPs and your 2026 album “Daydreaming Shalalala Circus”?
Without a doubt, we’ve progressed a lot, and in every respect. As musicians, we’re better, and we know how to communicate better through our instruments. As friends, we understand each other more and more, which is also vital. We’ve gained experience in the studio with production, both audio and video and social media, as well as with the more cumbersome and bureaucratic aspects of running the band as a business. We’ve also spent time living together in different places, for many days, and we’ve solved problems, argued, laughed and eaten together many times. It all adds up. The truth is, we’re very happy. By the time we made this album, we already had a very clear idea of the band’s identity and the sound we were looking for. We know what we like and, more importantly, what we don’t.

As I said earlier, your live show is a real spectacle. How did you come up with what you wanted to do on stage? Did the songs call for it, or did you already have that kind of stage presentation in mind before you knew what you were going to write?
It all comes partly from experience. Time is what tells you what works and what doesn’t, and what you feel comfortable with, which is fundamental in such a prefabricated scene. The particular circumstances of the moment lead us to add improvised things that may or may not remain. It’s something that is constantly changing. We’re not looking to create a fixed show, we’d get bored. The songs are what make you vibrate in a certain way, and things simply happen.

There are moments when you remind me a lot of Foxy Shazam, who are a modern version of the most excessive and unrestrained Queen.
We don’t know them, but we will.

Inevitable question… what musical references or influences do you have? Is there any Spanish band you feel you can identify with?
Bfffff… so many. Mainly in English, but there’s a bit of everything. Obviously, Queen is part of the package. Wet Leg, Viagra Boys, The Beatles, Creedence, Almost Monday, Oasis, Blur, Nancy Sinatra, Jamiroquai… ’90s or 2000s pop such as Britney, Take That…

One of your greatest strengths is that you have a very strong identity, which is no small thing nowadays, especially in Spain, where there are loads of bands that seem to have been made from the same mould. Is humor part of that identity?



Humor isn't something we consciously seek, but rather a consequence of who we are and how we process things. We can understand why people perceive that in us and, although it isn't intentional, we don't mind that being the case. In fact, we like it.

> ***It's exciting to see so many young bands trying to make their way in such a complex industry, and we love being part of that movement. Lately, we feel that people are demanding something much more real as a way to escape from a present that is overstimulated by social media.***

Because if you listen to "James Bond", besides being a great song, the lyrics are hilarious.
Sometimes you fall prey to deep daydreams that take you to imaginary countries where you have adventures, sometimes while you're asleep and other times because someone won't shut up and your mind escapes, and you find yourself with… Daniel Craig, for example, who looks like a nice guy. We were also lucky enough to play this song in Cascais, Portugal, which is the place that inspired Ian Fleming to conceive James Bond. So, Daniel, this one's for you. We hope to meet you someday. In any case, and as that band once said: "God Save The Queen".

Another characteristic is that you have two singers. How do you handle that? Does it depend on who writes the song? Aren't there any ego clashes?
Normally, it depends on who writes it, but we experiment quite a lot in the studio and we're not afraid to try things. One of the two brings an idea to the garage, but who knows what it will turn into after it goes through here. As for egos, we all want to defend our ideas, obviously, but we've learned to be honest and value what we think fits the band's sound best and, fortunately, we think Ian and Gus complement each other very well as songwriters, because they don't tend to come up with ideas that compete with each other. Sometimes one of them even encourages the other with a different point of view to finish something that wasn't quite working yet.

It feels like you take the idea of not taking yourselves too seriously very seriously. At a time when many bands project a very carefully calculated or solemn image, you embrace excess, humor and unrestrained energy. Is that a conscious reaction against that trend, or is that simply who you are?
It isn't an intentional reaction. We naturally move away from that trend because it doesn't fit our personality. We simply give ourselves the freedom to be who we are and not let anyone tell us what is supposedly right or wrong according to the trend. Of course, people tell us sometimes, but that's what such a wide range of options is for.

"Loser" is a great song, one of those songs you can imagine topping the charts and getting half the planet dancing. It's catchy, it sounds unrestrained… What can you tell us about this song? What did you have in mind when you wrote it? Then there are the lyrics, and I'm not sure how to take them. Is the whole thing about repeatedly calling yourselves "losers" ironic? I understand that you're playing with that double meaning, that you're saying, "If you think drinking too much, enjoying life, being a cynic, being a mess… means being a loser, then so be it, I'm going to dance while I celebrate it." Am I way off?
Well, we don't know. We must have forgotten somewhere along the way. But we think it's a deconstruction or, rather, a destruction of the idea of… Wait! We've got it: it turns out that, if you're lucky, over the years you meet people who show themselves as they really are and who see you as you really are. Your facade starts to fall away. Everything you thought you had to show becomes ridiculous. And it's a hell of a shock. But it's really good for you, and it has to be celebrated. Welcome losers!

When we were talking in Jerez and I mentioned that we also publish an English edition, your reaction was quite a statement of intent. Given that the album also sounds huge and very international, I imagine singing in English isn't a coincidence. Did you always know that you wanted to sound beyond our borders, or is it simply the language that fits your music best? Did you have that in mind when producing "Daydreaming Shalalala Circus"?
The truth is that we've always sung in English because our influences are mostly English-speaking, or Anglo-singers, which we don't know how to say. In reality, it's the language that fits our music best, and that obviously makes us aware that there is an international reach that would be more difficult in Spanish.

If someone discovered The Surroyal for the first time tomorrow, which song would you play for them to understand who you are?
To understand who we are, I'd tell that person to look up Daydreaming Shalalala Circus on their favorite platform and press play on whichever song catches their attention most because of its name. We think this is a good way to connect with our music without telling the listener what they should listen to (while they listen to us).

We've recently been talking to young bands, The Black-Suited Ladies in Badajoz, The Fixed Trio from Granada (who talk about the great state of the Granada scene), and you've seen the level of musicians there are in the province of Cádiz… What's the Seville scene like? From the outside, we've always looked at both scenes with a lot of envy, not only because of the number of great artists who come out of there and the great albums that are released there, but also because it feels like there's a real scene. How do you see it from your point of view in Seville, even though you're from San José de la Rinconada rather than the city of Seville itself?
It's exciting to see so many young bands trying to make their way in such a complex industry, and we love being part of that movement. Lately, we feel that people are demanding something much more real as an escape from a present that is overstimulated by social media, and bands have a lot to say in that regard, because what we offer is a more unique, more intimate experience in which the audience is part of it.

I've seen that you've entered more competitions, such as Villa de Madrid, and that you've played at FNAC Sevilla Live Fest, Interestelar… Has it never occurred to you to try to take part in Monkey Week? It's not a competition, and it's no longer in Seville, it has returned to El Puerto de Santa María. You'd be a fucking perfect fit for Monkey. Have you thought about it? Have you ever attended as part of the audience?
We haven't had the opportunity to take part in Monkey Week yet, but we'd love to be part of it someday. We believe that next year will be a good starting point for us to begin taking part in this kind of large-scale festival, since our first album has given us confidence and we feel more prepared to take on stages like that.

How is the album doing, or do you feel that it's doing well? What are your immediate plans for it and its promotion?
Given how little time it's been out, it's being very well received and getting a lot of love. It's reaching people in many countries, and even important people in the industry, so we're very happy. Even so, we have a year of a lot of hard work ahead of us, and we're going to keep promoting it and fighting to reach a wider audience. Hopefully, it will reach everyone who might enjoy it. We have several music videos still to release, and we're looking into new strategies. Interesting and fucking tough months are coming.

Javistone

SERIE BOOTLEGS

Por Sob 2026



Aquí estamos otra vez, en esta entrega veraniega de nuestra querida Rock Bottom Magazine. Esta vez, y como el verano ha venido un poquito retorcido, me apetece volver la vista atrás a momentos más agradables donde nuestra preocupación vital era otra. Os quería traer esta vez un recuerdo maravilloso de aquel verano de 1996, como bien dice nuestra querida Nat Simmons en una de sus canciones, y volver a mirar a aquel año cara a cara.

Here we are again, with this summer edition of our beloved Rock Bottom Magazine. This time, and since summer has arrived a little twisted, I feel like looking back at more pleasant moments, when our main concern in life was something else. This time I wanted to bring you a wonderful memory of that summer of 1996, as our dear Nat Simmons rightly says in one of her songs, and take another look at that year face to face.



In the first days of May that year, the Madrid edition of Festimad became a massive event, with a huge festival in Móstoles, several stages, lots of different music from one stage to another, from one day to the next, and even from one hour to the next. I remember that Friday afternoon when the festival was officially inaugurated at “El Soto”, how going from one band to another, all of them new to us, filled us with adrenaline.

That night Rancid and Cypress Hill played on the main stage and, well, I just wanted to remember Rancid's show, the "...And Out Came the Wolves" tour, an amazing album that blew our minds, a huge concert that afternoon at Festimad. The concert I'm bringing you isn't exactly the one from that night in Madrid, but rather one from a few weeks later, in Rochester, U.S.A., specifically on May 31, 1996, with a double bill featuring Rancid and Rocket from the Crypt. If what we experienced in Madrid was a night charged with energy, this double bill must have been something else. Here's the setlist:

Rancid 1996-03-31 Rochester, NY, Water Street Music Hall

1. intro music
2. "Maxwell Murder"
3. "Roots Radicals"
4. Avenues & Alleyways"
5. "Time Bomb"
6. "The Ballad of Jimmy & Johnny"
7. banter #1
8. "Black and Blue"
9. "She's Automatic"
10. "Adina"
11. "The Wars End"
12. "Salvation"
13. "Gunshot"
14. "Lock, Step & Gone"
15. banter #2
16. "The 11th Hour"
17. "Tenderloin"
18. "Olympia WA."
19. "Junkie Man"
20. "Old Friend"
21. "St. Mary"
22. banter #3
23. "Radio"
24. encore break
25. jam
26. "I Wanna Riot"
27. "Ruby Soho"

Back to the seventies, that glorious decade for music, we find the raw voice of Rod Stewart and the charismatic Faces in a BBC performance at the Paris Theatre in London on May 13, 1971. This performance was recorded in front of a live audience at the Paris Theatre and broadcast by the BBC on May 23. The Faces wanted to do two things: play their best songs live, but also introduce new songs from their latest album, "Long Player", released in March. They begin with Rod Stewart's solo track, "You're My Girl". At eleven minutes long, it is practically the best performance of the entire broadcast. Then Stewart tells everyone: "Here's one we've never played on the programme before, called 'Cut Across Shorty'." This performance is the only one from this session to be officially released and appears on "Five Guys Walk Into A Bar". Next, they play a long version of "Love In Vain", the Rolling Stones' version of the Robert Johnson song.

"Tonight is the night for new things", Stewart says before "Bad And Ruin". "This song has never been played before, except when we recorded it for the album 'Long Player'. So, if we fall apart halfway through the song, you know, just take it as a joke", he adds with nervous laughter. However, the song does not fall apart halfway through. "Had Me A Real Good Time" is the other song from the new album that they play.

Before finishing, Stewart jokes: "We've forgotten to play one of the best songs we do… 'Losing You', yes. It's an old Temptations song and they were great. They're not anymore because they lost the greatest singer in the world, David Ruffin". They perform a compact six-minute version of their rendition, which includes a very brief but intense drum solo by Kenny Jones.

Set list:

1. "John Peel Intro"
2. "You're My Girl"
3. "Cut Across Shorty"
4 "Love In Vain"
5. "Bad'n Ruin"
6. "It's All Over Now"
7. "Had Me A Real Good Time"
8. "I'm Losing You"

Depeche Mode 2024-03-16, Palau Sant Jordi, Barcelona, Spain

We change gears and move towards more electronic sounds, but just as intense. Depeche Mode's 2024 tour was a powerful and spirited return to the stages, making it clear who has ruled this style from its distant beginnings in the early eighties to the present day. The band led by Dave Gahan and Martin Gore, it is true that the new songs pale in comparison to the classics from "Violator", "Songs of Faith and Devotion" and all those classics that, as hard rockers in the eighties, took us years to understand, but which, once we opened our ears, have accompanied us for many years. Great concert, especially the second half, with great songs linked one after another until culminating in an outstanding "Personal Jesus".





Geoff Tate
July 18, Sala La Trinchera (Málaga)

Last June, former Queensrÿche vocalist Geoff Tate was touring Spain, revisiting the classic album he released with his band in 1988, "Operation: Mindcrime". An ambitious rock opera that marked the beginning of the Seattle-based band's massive success. With a stop at Sala Trinchera in Málaga, part of the Metal 'N Rock Radio team headed to the neighboring city to witness the show, carrying with us the good memory Geoff left us with three years ago in Murcia, when we saw him perform the albums "Rage for Order" and the million-selling "Empire" in their entirety, with the vocalist literally going all out. The evening, or rather the afternoon, which was quite hot, by the way, began with Irish singer-songwriter James Keegan, who, armed with his acoustic guitar, did what he could to entertain the small audience scattered around the venue.

After Keegan's tranquility came the hurricane of Irish band Ogma, a quartet that pleasantly surprised us, sounding fresh and powerful. The band has just released an EP, from which they played two or three songs, along with a couple of Thin Lizzy and Free covers to get things warmed up. A highly recommended band led by guitarist James Brown, who is usually one of Tate's guitarists. We also had vocalist Dj O'Sullivan, who also played guitar, and the friendly bassist Jimmy Wynen. Interestingly, these three musicians would go on to be part of the former Queensrÿche vocalist's band. You know, you have to economize in these times.

With a slight delay compared to the scheduled time, Geoff Tate took the stage with his band, which, besides the three members of Ogma, featured Michelle Panepinto on drums, very good indeed, and a fantastic guitarist named Amaury Altmayer. Also handling keyboards, backing vocals and the role of Sister Mary was Irish singer Clodagh McCarthy. With the album's appropriate intros, the concert began to the delight of a crowd that filled the venue. One by one, and in order, all the songs from "Operation: Mindcrime" were played, with a very theatrical Geoff Tate interacting with the audience and displaying a huge stage presence. It should be noted that, for his age, the singer is in excellent vocal and physical shape. The downside was, to some extent, the sound, as all the instruments would sometimes overpower Tate's voice, somewhat diminishing his performance.

After finishing "Mindcrime", the band continued with other songs from Queensrÿche's old repertoire, playing classics such as "Silent Lucidity", "Empire" and the brilliant "Jet City Woman". They also performed a couple of songs from Tate's recent new album, called "Operation: Mindcrime III", ending on a celebratory note with that cannon blast of a song, "Queen of the Reich". Everyone was happy, audience and band alike.

All in all, a very enjoyable concert by Geoff Tate and his band. We should mention the impeccable execution of the songs and his vocal performance. Many of us believe that, nowadays, it is more worthwhile to see Tate than what remains of Queensrÿche. Although, to be honest, we enjoyed the one we saw in Murcia a few years ago more. What we don't know is whether any fan would pay the eighty euros Tate was asking for a photo with him at the venue. By the way, the sign announcing it was very rustic, handwritten with a marker on a piece of cardboard.

Metal 'N Rock Radio
Foto Migue Uceda
(Migueucedafotografía)





Sting, Granada Bullring (July 15, 2026)

As the years go by, they leave behind in us, as lovers of rock, a certain residue of experiences, songs and moments that gradually accumulate in that part of the brain responsible for producing the pleasure of nostalgia. We are often unaware of the journey involved in listening to bands that are no longer part of our everyday lives, but that somehow belong to our own lives. The Police is probably the band that most clearly represents the fact that music can casually turn your soul upside down. I like the band a lot, but I'm not particularly a fan. And yet, they have always been there. I return to them every so often and really enjoy a body of work that has aged remarkably well.

Exactly twenty-six years ago, Sting came to Granada in a trio format, and I remember that even in the review I wrote at the time, I was already struck by the charismatic singer, bassist, songwriter and soul of The Police being in such splendid shape. I have always followed his solo career, and there were moments, in the late eighties, when he tried to adapt his former band's songs to a slower, more laid-back way of understanding life. In those days, Sting was closely associated with the African-influenced movement championed by fellow musicians such as Paul Simon and Peter Gabriel, who explored (and commercially exploited) the rhythms and sounds of Third World countries. At concerts such as the tribute to Nelson Mandela, Sting stripped down songs that were necessarily electric and made them sound closer to things of his own making; his move towards a more mature sound was already evident in his own repertoire, in songs such as "They Dance Alone" and "Fragile". Years earlier, the same thing had happened with the world of jazz ("Bring on the Night"). Sting has been and remains a sponge who has travelled from reggae-rock to adult pop and Latin music. So, after reaching maturity, deciding to rebuild what he had deconstructed was a breath of fresh air for a repertoire that deserved to return to high voltage.

And so, both at that distant date in 2000 and on this hot afternoon-evening in 2026, the (miracle of nature that is the) tall and wiry Englishman returned to the bullring in the city of Granada. And, in fact, the best thing I can say, which is saying quite a lot, is that he doesn't seem to have aged twenty-six years. Perhaps the only concession to comfort is the use of a headset microphone, along with having the show as fully "claqued" as possible, something that was noticeable in the atmospheres woven around the songs. But in every other respect (attitude, connection with the audience, etc.), it was like seeing that slim, hyperactive young man again, one who would go wild with his band in the late seventies. And yes, The Police songs sounded exactly as they should, powerful, instantly singable… who doesn't get emotional hearing songs like "Message in a Bottle", "Can't Stand Losing You" or "So Lonely", performed at their original speed, with the pulse that made them great?

Sting, of course, has every right to showcase his solo work, perhaps not as groundbreaking, but equally well established: the beautiful "Englishman in New York" and the crowd-pleasing "Mad About You" were central to the show, with Sting gathering his strength to launch back into songs like "Roxanne". His bandmates remained very much in the background, barely stealing any of the spotlight. And not only from Sting. They did not try to emulate the instrumental precision of Copeland and Summers either, but they provided the necessary support for an imposing Gordon Matthew Thomas Sumner to once again give us a taste of musical magic, as he did with the closing "Every Breath You Take", "Roxanne" and "Fragile". Perhaps it was more nostalgia than anything else, perhaps we allowed ourselves to be carried away by the comfort of the things that make us feel happy and safe, but no one that night could have felt disappointed. Keep going!

Jesús Sánchez

The Thunderbeats





Talking to The Thunderbeats means entering a universe where blues, rhythm and blues, British beat and '60s psychedelia coexist with a fascinating passion for Soviet analog technology. A band that possesses a genuine musical wealth (their own particular "Gold of Moscow") and has managed to transform influences from Bo Diddley, Slim Harpo, Jimmy Reed, The Rolling Stones, The Yardbirds, The Animals and The Kinks into a language of their own, without giving up the spontaneity and imperfections that make their sound unique. But above styles, eras and borders, there is one element that defines The Thunderbeats: a love of music. "From Russia with Love" could therefore be the perfect title for this conversation, because behind every song, every instrument and every recording, you can feel the passion of musicians (Alex Cherniaev, vocals; Roman Karetnikov, keyboards; Vadim Markov, bass, and Oleg Peskov, drums) who, as they themselves explain, don't just make music: they live for it.

In July, you released a new single featuring Tin Pan Alley and the unreleased Jo Ann as a first taste of the album coming out in September. Why did you choose these two particular songs to introduce this new chapter of The Thunderbeats?
Alex Cherniaev: Yes, The Thunderbeats have released a new single. These tracks will not appear on an album; they are simply a standalone single. We had intended to record another garage-beat album, but things have changed. Instead, in September we'll release Blues Masters Vol. 2 (a working title for now). Everything has already been recorded and is ready. This project represents our vision and interpretation of songs by Blind Lemon Jefferson, Boll Weevil Jackson, and many others.

Tin Pan Alley was already included on your previous album, Four Minutes Ago. What made you decide to bring it back for this release? Is it a new mix, a new recording, or simply a way of giving the song a second chance to reach a wider audience?
Alex Cherniaev: We did another take of this song with an entirely different arrangement. On the LP, there was a version where we explored the Rhythm-2 synthesizer and fuzz bass. For the single, we stuck to our tried-and-true recording setup: slide guitar, Vox organ, bass, and drums. Ultimately, the result carries something of The Doors and The Seeds' style.

Jo Ann, on the other hand, is a brand-new song. What can you tell us about how it came about, the story behind it, and the role it plays on the upcoming album?
Alex Cherniaev: We have a joke about how many songs you can craft using the chords from "Gloria," and "Jo Ann" is one of those tunes. As I've already said, this track will not appear on the new album. It's a live version recorded during the shoots at 23studio. There is also a studio recording by Jo Ann, but we judged it not as strong as the live version. It features a somewhat different

arrangement, leaning toward "? and the Mysterians". We may release this recording at a later date.

One of the most distinctive aspects of The Thunderbeats is your commitment to analogue recording using vintage Soviet-era equipment. How did this fascination with U.S.S.R. technology begin, and what does it bring to your sound that modern digital studios cannot?
Vadim Markov: I've loved soldering and repairing electronic equipment for as long as I can remember. My father was a radio amateur, and back then we were surrounded by Soviet-made gear. There really wasn't much opportunity to get our hands on anything else! Over the years, I learned how to get the sound I wanted out of the best Soviet equipment. To me, vintage analog gear is very different from digital technology. It's full of quirks and happy accidents. You never have complete control over the result, and that's part of its magic. The Thunderbeats actually enjoy working that way. Those little imperfections and surprises help shape our own sound, and in the end it becomes very close to the music we love and want to create.

Is there a particular piece of Soviet gear—a tape machine, microphone, mixing desk, or anything else—that you feel has become essential to the band's sound?
Vadim Markov: Yes, definitely. By pure coincidence, we've accumulated quite a collection of excellent Soviet microphones in our studio over the years. We record virtually everything—including the drums—using vintage Oktava ML-15 and Oktava ML-16 ribbon microphones. Alexey's vocals are always recorded through a vintage LOMO 19A-19 tube microphone. Almost all of our processing is done with our own Magnetec tube equalizer, which Mila and I build ourselves. It's our interpretation of the legendary Pultec EQP-1A, and any studio interested in that classic analog sound can purchase one directly from us.

Listening to your records, it is impossible not to think of the British beat peak and rhythm and blues explosion of the mid-sixties. Which artists and albums had the biggest impact on you when you first decided to form the band?
Alex Cherniaev: Primarily, this is Black rhythm and blues, featuring bands like Bo Diddley, Slim Harpo, Jimmy Reed, and many others in that style; this is The Rolling Stones, in their Brian Jones era, and even now their 1966–1967 period remains a major source of inspiration for me: the music, the look. The Yardbirds—everything they did; The Animals—especially their blend of fuzz guitar and Vox organ; The Kinks—their early songs, with unusual harmonies and the distinct timbre of their voices. Manfred Mann's first album—a masterpiece of British rhythm and blues. And so much more... Soul and jazz, of course. But most importantly, we heard how British groups fully reimagined blues standards created by Black musicians, and wanted to do the same, bringing their own vision to songs by other performers. In the beginning, hardly anyone imagined writing their own songs; what stood out was the sound.

Although you are a Russian band, all your songs are performed in English. Was that simply a natural consequence of the music you grew up loving, or was it also a conscious decision to connect with audiences beyond Russia?
Alex Cherniaev: All of our beloved music is in English, so it feels completely natural for us to sing in English too. The focus here is on phonetics and the cadence of each line. At the moment, we're experimenting with Russian texts, aiming to weave them into the music's rhythm and groove, and we're curious to see what kind of result this exploration yields.

At a time when many retro bands seem content to recreate a vintage sound, The Thunderbeats come across as something much more genuine—as if you are not just playing the music of the sixties but genuinely living and breathing its spirit. How do you strike the balance between paying tribute to that era and developing your own identity?
Alex Cherniaev: Individuality has never been something we set out to cultivate; it simply unfolds. We've always made a point of staying apart, avoiding the usual genre cliques, and we don't measure ourselves against other groups. We're living in our own world, and maybe that's why things tend to click into place. "We all live in the yellow submarine."

Since the outbreak of the war between Russia and Ukraine, many Russian artists have faced increasing difficulties when it comes to travelling and performing abroad. How has this situation affected The Thunderbeats, both professionally and on a personal level?
Alex Cherniaev: War has proved a real shock for us; no one expected something like this. The world has changed once again—first the COVID-19 pandemic, then war. We saw the way the world began to treat Russians; many restrictions, air travel became more difficult, and many of our acquaintances emigrated to various countries. We stayed. Questions about our choices started to surface; the answer is simple: this is our homeland, here are our families and loved ones. Once the initial shock passed, a new reality emerged in which we would have to take action somehow. At our own risk, in 2023 we embarked on a tour of Spain. It wouldn't be fair to call it a success next to the 2020 tour, but it was very important for us to break through the barrier.

What have been the biggest challenges in recent years when it comes to organising tours, appearing at festivals, or simply staying in touch with your international audience?
Alex Cherniaev: It's a straightforward situation: prices have surged, from air travel to the impact of the euro exchange rate. When it comes to staying in touch with our European fans, for now we're limited to social networks, which, unfortunately, are banned in Russia.

Despite these obstacles, your music continues to find listeners all over the world. Are you surprised to discover such a loyal audience outside Russia, particularly in countries like Spain, where you have a remarkably enthusiastic fan base?
Alex Cherniaev: We truly value our audience, of course. Despite the many obstacles we've faced, their support keeps growing, and on a global scale we're more popular than we are back home in Russia.

I know that you have many devoted fans in Spain—myself included. It is clear that you have a special affection for the country as well; after all, you even used a photograph taken outside Madrid's legendary Fun House venue for one of your EPs. Do you still hope to return and play in Spain in the near future?
Alex Cherniaev: We hold Spain in high regard; we have many supporters and friends here, and we certainly hope to come back. As for the photo, yes, we chose a shot for the album cover taken at the doors of Fun House in Madrid. It is our tribute to your wonderful country, a warm greeting from us.

Looking back, what memories stand out from your previous visits and concerts here? And finally, what message would you like to send to your Spanish fans, who have continued to support The Thunderbeats over the years?
Alex Cherniaev: We carry with us a lot of wonderful memories: Purple Weekend, the tour with the Minnesota Voodoo Men, and our final concert in Malaga. We've met countless amazing bands and great people along the way. We sincerely hope that the world situation will improve, allowing us to return to Europe as we did before. We're certain we'll see each other again soon.

In Russia, can you make a living from music, or do you do it as a hobby?
Alex Cherniaev: Music is what I live for; it isn't always easy, but it gives my life a clear sense of purpose. Our keyboardist, Roman Karetnikov, likewise devotes all his time to music. Bassist Vadim Markov runs a recording studio and manufactures recording equipment. Drummer Oleg Peskov, meanwhile, works in an office.

Thank you so much for taking Rock Bottom Magazine's call, and we sincerely hope everything gets sorted out and we can see you soon. Best regards

NOVEDADES

Jack White, "Frozen Charlotte" (Third Man Records)



"If Jack White did not exist, the 21st century would be a much more boring time." The phrase is not mine, but I can subscribe to it word for word. Jack White has been (and still is) one of the great animators of the scene since he began his rise with The White Stripes in the final year of the 20th century, establishing himself in the following one as a reference point for everything related to reviving the sounds of the past and bringing them into the present day. On "Frozen Charlotte", his seventh solo album, the Detroit native tightens the screws even further when it comes to his most classic sound, as he had already done on his previous "No Name", but with a much more raw sound, thanks to a production that borders on the rudimentary (understand that term in context). White's suffocating "hardrockbluesy" guitar riffs and his trademark shrill, distorted voice are the protagonists and the central focus of the entire album, which gives us fair warning with two full-blown blasts that leave you breathless, "GOD and the Broken Ribs" and "Derecho Demonico", two songs we already knew and which the good Mr. White made sure to present in grand fashion on Saturday Night Live last spring. By the time you are finishing taking this in, the Led Zeppelin-esque riff of "There´s Nobody There" already has you firmly by the most intimate parts, before leading into a frenzy between White's guitar and Bobby Emmet's Hammond, which flows directly into the furious "Raising The Grain" and "You´ll Never Fix Me", bringing the album's first side to an end. It is true that, at this point, we have not found a single potential hit (perhaps the opening track), but there is no need for one. The album sounds solid and compact, so much so that you almost welcome the pause required to turn it over on your player. But it is all an illusion, because as soon as the needle drops and the chords of "Nobody Knows" begin, with that clipped, very "Black Crowes-esque" intro and those choruses that are pure Detroit essence, you understand that the journey continues without pause into the hells of an unleashed Jack White who, lyrically, gives ample evidence throughout the album that he is seriously pissed off with the current state of things.

The blues energy of "Dollar Bill", the album's latest advance single, "I Can´t Believe What I'm Hearing" and "Thick As Thieves" take us into a final stretch where White and the rest of the musicians accompanying him, Patrick Keeler on drums, Dominic Davis on bass and the aforementioned Bobby Emmet on keyboards (regulars at the Third Man Records factory, and lately his live band), get playful in the wild abandon of "All Alone Again", the almost glam "She´s Frenzy" and a devastating "Making Contact", which recall the most inspired White Stripes, before finally closing with the trademark dragging, swampy blues of "Neighbour Blues".
In short, an album whose most notable characteristics are rage, venom, rawness and a devastating sound as heavy as an eight-axle truck. Album of the year?
Marcos Sánchez

Parker, Gillespie, Powell, Mingus et Roach, "Live At Massey Hall" (Frémeaux & Associés)



Several of these names belong to some of the greatest musicians in jazz and have outstanding and highly recommended releases on Frémeaux. We also have compilations such as "Histoire Du Jazz" or plenty of great live recordings in the highly recommended "Live In Paris" collection, but having Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Bud Powell, Charlie Mingus and Max Roach together at a single concert is an absolute delight. That is what this brand-new "Live At Massey Hall" contains, recorded in Toronto on May 15, 1953. A historic recording that opens with 'The Quintet Of The Year' performing extended classics such as 'Perdido' and 'All The Things You Are'. It continues with a fantastic drum solo by Max Roach. After that, the Bud Powell Trio takes over with wonderful standards such as 'Embraceable You' and Cole Porter's 'I've Got You Under My Skin', with Powell performing all kinds of devilry on the piano. Then, bringing the recording to more than 70 minutes, the quintet returns with the more-than-nine-minute 'Hot House' and the nearly eight-minute 'A Night In Tunisia'. As if that were not enough, there is a special edition that includes the book of the same title, which can also be purchased separately. No wonder the label categorizes it as a "Historic Recording"!
Txema Mañeru

Álex Conde, "Paco de Lucía: Music For Big Band (Live)" (Karonte)



Conde is one of the world's finest pianists at the moment when it comes to combining flamenco and jazz. He demonstrated this last year with "El Trío", featuring a brilliant rhythm section formed by Pablo Martín Caminero and Michael Olivera. An album with fantastic arrangements and outstanding compositions bearing a strong personal touch. He does it again now with this tribute to the great Paco de Lucía that he had been so eager to make. A few months ago, we loved what Travellin' Brothers Big Band did when they transferred their repertoire of blues, soul and rhythm and blues into the rich Big Band format, with as many as 10 horn players. Conde has achieved something very similar here, also with an outstanding and sizeable ensemble. More than 70 minutes and more than 25 musicians (with 13 horn players on this occasion). Special mention must be made of the brilliant guitars of Antonio Sánchez and the vocals of Rafita de Madrid. More than 11 minutes for the already familiar 'Buana Buana King Kong'. Beautiful 'Canción de Amor' and more than fifteen minutes for his classic 'Zyriab', including the excellent intro. An obligatory farewell with the legendary 'Entre Dos Aguas', with more than seven superb minutes. A fantastic idea, brilliantly executed!
Txema Mañeru

Les Testarudes, "Ai, Mare!" (Buenritmo)
It has taken these nine women a while to complete their first full-length album. Built around the best Jamaican rhythms and sounds close to ska and rocksteady, with great instrumental and vocal richness.



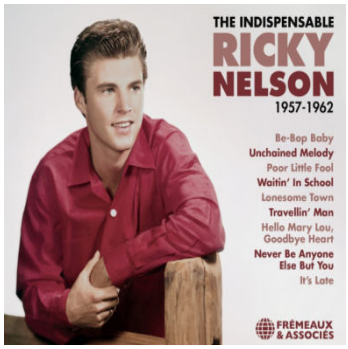
Its fitting title, "Ai, Mare!" (Buenritmo), represents a powerful cry for them, somewhere between vertigo and euphoria. After years of experimentation and growth, they have matured, full of awareness and freedom to do what they love most, with greater maturity and broader tastes that they have managed to develop. They begin with the rhythm of a funeral march, but with a trumpet sounding like Chet Baker, on 'Taracea'. Good vocals, backing vocals and horns on the rhythmic 'Soc El Foc (Baby)', also featuring fine guitar work. Xérif, from Dr. Calypso, delivers a good duet on the truly syncopated 'Relleu Sincopat'. Winks at the Basque Country and words in Basque in the amusing 'Un Mamut'. Effective instrumental track, with a recommendation like 'Beware Of The Police'. Plenty of prominence for the four horns, but also the organ shines on the splendid 'Where's My Car?'. They pay tribute to Toti Soler and move deftly towards soul with their tribute to the women of the genre in 'Plou I Fa Soul', although in the carefully produced inner booklet they can be seen admiring a vinyl record by the legends of their style, The Skatalites. Visceral, restless and dedicated to live performance.
Txema Mañeru

Antonio Hernando, "Ernie Graham" (Self-Released)



If you like Irish folk-rock, you should know Ernie Graham, and you will be rewarded. But you should also make a note of the name of a passionate Antonio Hernando. Ernie released an excellent self-titled album in 1971, which was highly sought-after for many years and now seems to be receiving somewhat more recognition. In fact, Hernando even travelled there to play with some of his musicians, following his understandable musical obsession with him. He has made a podcast about him and is about to publish a book about his life. Almost entirely on his own, he has recovered the eight great tracks from an album that opens with the excellent and highly melodic 'Sebastian'. Bob Dylan and The Band are mentioned, but also Bert Jansch, Tim Hardin, Nick Drake, Fred Neil, Elliott Smith and another legend miraculously rediscovered, Sixto Rodríguez. Raw and solitary on the sad 'So Lonely'. Good interplay between acoustic and electric guitars on the epic 'Sea Fever'. The Dylan and Young side comes out with the harmonica that opens 'The Girl That Turned The Level', which closes the first side. Great vocal melody and good backing vocals and harmonica on 'For A Little While'. Suso Díaz contributes slide guitar on 'Blues To Snowy'. Hints of The Band on 'Don't Want Me Round You', with guitar and organ by Tomás Virgós. The journey ends in 'Belfast', that of the early, more acoustic and folk-oriented Van Morrison, with the Celtic touch, so evident in Graham, provided by Manu Clavijo's violin. A pleasant surprise in the form of a musical adventure!
Txema Mañeru

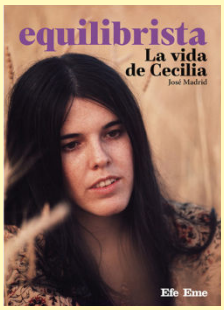
Ricky Nelson, "The Indispensable 1957-1962" (Frémeaux & Associés)



As always with this magnificent collection, whose title is more than justified, two CDs and two and a half hours containing all the songs he recorded during his best years. He stood out as an actor and was one of the biggest stars of the late fifties, becoming a true symbol of young rock 'n' roll alongside Elvis Presley. Here we have the best of his recordings for Imperial Records and tracks from legendary albums such as "It's Up To You" and "Seven By Rick". 'Poor Little Fool' and the catchy 'Be-Bop Baby' in its single version could not be missing. The fantastic guitar of Elvis, James Burton, stands out, with the immortal riff on George & Ira Gershwin's 'Summertime', with a pure New Orleans voodoo rhythm. The pure dancing and joy of 'Hello Mary Lou' also shine. As you can see, there is plenty of rock 'n' roll, but also those fine country-flavoured songs (a good example being 'I Can't Help It') and his ballads that made many women of the time fall in love. Among them, 'A Teenager's Romance', with its doo-wop backing vocals, the acoustic 'Lonesome Town' with its deep backing vocals, the tender 'I Need You' and his fantastic version of the classic 'Unchained Melody' stand out. As a bonus, four accomplished spirituals complete the set, bringing it to 66 tracks, along with a juicy sixteen-page booklet.
Txema Mañeru

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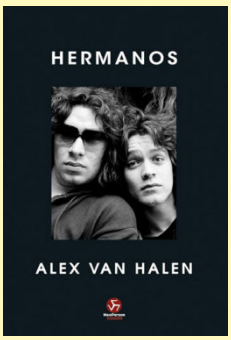
José Madrid, "Equilibrista. La Vida De Cecilia" (Efe Eme)



A singer and person of Cecilia's calibre deserved this great book about her, even though she has been dead for several decades. Her music and songs have lived on throughout all these years and will continue to do so in the future for a good number of people. Moreover, the book by the prestigious and film-oriented José Madrid lives up to the task. It is his only book about music and is a very good update of the book he already wrote fifteen years ago. "Equilibrista: La Vida de Cecilia" is the first biography of Eva Sobredo (Cecilia's real name), a legendary figure in Spanish music who is much more than the creator of 'Un Ramito de Violetas' or 'Mi Querida España'. She sang bravely against the social conventions of her difficult era and defended her right to feel like a free and empowered woman at a time when this concept was not even known here. Considered by many, and rightly so, to be the country's most emblematic female singer-songwriter. Almost two hundred and fifty pages with many excellent photographs, including eight pages of carefully selected full-colour photographs on glossy paper. A book handled with great rigour and packed with very interesting and valuable documentation. Naturally, it deals with the censorship of the time, as well as her passion for Valle-Inclán. She died in a traffic accident at the fateful age of twenty-seven (she would therefore be a member of the "27 Club"). The book begins with its author explaining why this second life was given to the book, followed by the original 2011 prologue. It is structured around unpublished interviews with friends and family members. Also with key figures such as her main composer, Juan Carlos Calderón. At first, he did not like either her appearance or her voice. Nor did he like her introverted and elusive nature or her sharp voice for the time. He later changed his mind and spoke of her as our very own Janis Joplin. The "Epilogue" is also new to this edition, and in it the author regrets never having been able to see her perform live and how many people tell him that they did, which is something he would have loved. There is room for personal correspondence from the artist and a great deal of interesting documentation. She was a tightrope walker of music and life who had to contend with a difficult era, with her own unique and special universe that made her stand out among other women and maintain her balance in a vital sphere and a country where doing so was

quite an achievement. Historic, revolutionary and problematic, yes, but we still need more women and artists like her!
Txema Mañeru

Alex Van Halen, "Hermanos" (NeoPerson Sounds / Alfaomega)



Here we have a warm, intimate and sincere narrative that has little to do with the typical memoirs of rock bands or artists. This moving book is really an intimate account of the bond between two brothers and rock 'n' roll. Like good brothers in the world of rock 'n' roll, they had fights in the style of the Gallaghers, the Davies or the Wilsons. But they also always had a very special musical and human connection. Edward is no longer with us, and the pain of his brother, Alex (the drummer), can be felt in these pages, which are full of truth. Two hundred and fifty-four pages, plus sixteen pages of excellent photographs. A passionate story of brotherhood, music and unconditional love. Despite their disputes and their problems with alcohol (Alex's father made him try it when he was only six years old, and he has no problem talking about it, acknowledging that both brothers were alcoholics). A book that captures you from the heartfelt "Overture". Alex acknowledges that they shared a record player in a seventy-five-square-metre house (which they later bought) and also a work ethic. He also admits to having spent more hours in the studio than in any other aspect of his life. The introduction to this "Overture" is written by Edward himself, saying that it would not exist without his brother, even though he is no longer with us. He says they shared a bond and an unconditional love that very few people ever get to experience in their lives. "We're not a rock band. We're a rock and roll band. Alex is the rock; I'm the roll." Moving, indeed! The quote that opens the final "Coda" is by Stine Van Halen, who tells us how they could finish each other's sentences or hold entire conversations without speaking. They had a tacit understanding, an incredible trust. They supported each other. That was how things remained until Ed's recent, but somewhat premature, death. They exploded onto the scene in '78 with "Van Halen" and their unforgettable version of 'You Really Got Me' by the Kinks, but they had other big singles such as 'Jump' and million-selling albums such as "5150". The book ends with even more love, recalling how McCartney said The Beatles were brothers who argued. That is what families do. To those words, Al responds that they will see each other again and that when that happens he will give him a beating. Brothers forever! It is no surprise that he tells him he loves him and knows they will see each other again and that they will play together for hours and days. And that's despite Alex already being seventy years old when this book was published in his home country two years ago!
Txema Mañeru

Emilio Ramón, "No Somos Beethoven: Los que Hicieron El Punk Antes del Punk" (Lenoir Ediciones)



A book with this subject matter and this title could not have had a better person to write the Foreword than the legendary Rafa Cervera, although it could just as easily have been Eloy Pérez Ladaga, author, together with Eduardo Izquierdo, of "El Punk. Guías Del Rock & Roll". It starts from an original idea that is very well developed, and for it, Chilean literature professor Emilio Ramón draws on the theory of art historian and essayist Georges Didi-Huberman about how concepts such as style or time are neither rigid nor linear. Hence Emilio, who also wrote the book "Ramones en 32 Canciones", tells us about what punk was, for him, before 1975 in London or New York. On the cover we have a true punk figure like Vince Taylor, while the back cover features the cover of Elvis Presley's debut album, which The Clash clearly drew inspiration from for the legendary cover of "London Calling", one of the five best albums in history for many people and, especially, for me. This book therefore offers us something very different. Namely, that punk crystallised in London and New York in '75, but it did so after two decades of musical, social and aesthetic tensions that originated in the 1950s. In this way, it connects Elvis with The Clash, Beethoven with Chuck Berry, and Jerry Lee Lewis with MC5. Emilio's surprising research shows us how imperfection, error and urgency were transformed into aesthetic values in opposition to the canon of virtuosity. From Little Richard's screams and the urban rawness of The Velvet Underground to the noise of musicians marginalised by the official narrative, such as Link Wray or Los Saicos. Thus, he creates an unprecedented history of punk before that style existed as such or was known by that name. Of course, the now customary playlists are also included, functioning as an audio map of the journey through this noisy and rebellious music that changed the world forever and that remains, and will continue to remain, relevant until the end of time. I am writing this now after having just enjoyed myself to the fullest at great punk concerts by The Adicts, Tropical Fuck Storm and Shame.
Txema Mañeru

Pau Gómez, "Nolan. La Épica Del Tiempo" (Blume)



We had gone a few months without any new film-related releases from Blume. Perhaps that is why we are celebrating the appearance of yet another luxurious volume all the more. This time it is about Christopher Nolan, perhaps the most important filmmaker of the new millennium. It was also very logical that an expert such as Pau Gómez should take on this task. A journalist specialising in cinema who has already published fourteen books. A good example is the recent and highly recommended Blume volume on Pedro Almodóvar. But he has also written books about Steven Spielberg, David Fincher, Robert Zemeckis, Ridley Scott, Clint Eastwood, Martin Scorsese, Denis Villeneuve and Alejandro Amenábar. I love his dedication: "To my children, who, every day, remind me that love is the only force capable of transcending space and time." Pau makes it clear that Nolan is not a conventional filmmaker. His stories are epic labyrinths in which time expands and twists, asserts itself and dissolves. A good example was the madness of "Tenet", with two plotlines in the story, one moving towards the future and the other moving backwards. Perhaps that is why, and as an exception among these excellent Blume monographs, the cinematic overview goes from the present into the past. This highly visual overview begins with "The Odyssey", undoubtedly one of the films of the year and one that will sweep the upcoming Academy Awards, a magnificent and highly visual epic adventure, and "Oppenheimer", and ends with "Memento" and "Following", his '98 debut. As always, there are countless huge full-colour photographs, most of them filling entire pages. It is true that even pronouncing his name is a challenge to logic. Of course, the importance of his meticulous attention to film scores is also highlighted. Here, the work of the great Hans Zimmer shines particularly brightly. I do not want to miss the opportunity to say that my favourite film of his, and one of the best in history, is "Interstellar", which I like more and more each time, and which moves me whenever I watch it again. It is one of those given the most space, a total of fourteen pages, among the one hundred and ninety pages that make up this luxurious hardcover book. An interesting Preface with the striking title "Sé Verlas Al Revés". Even better is the final Foreword, written by the prestigious Oriol Paulo, in an "Ars Temporis" that refreshes many of the key elements of Nolan's exceptional cinema. A filmmaker who has managed to turn time into a narrative artefact!
Txema Mañeru



Hammer: Blood, Sex and Monsters in Color



There is an image that sums up quite well what happened to Hammer in the late fifties. A man in a white coat cuts open a corpse, sticks his hands where no sane person should ever put them and, when he looks up, we see the monster, his creation. So far, nothing particularly revolutionary. Frankenstein had been walking across screens for decades. The problem, or perhaps the beauty of it, was that this was happening in color and the blood was red. Very red. And the scientist didn't look much like some poor wretch victimized by his obsessions. He looked more like an English gentleman born with money, free time and a laboratory. The film was "The Curse of Frankenstein" ("The Curse of Frankenstein", 1957), it premiered in London in May 1957 and changed the fortunes of Hammer Film Productions forever.

Until then, Hammer had been a British production company with modest success, quite accustomed to making a bit of this and a bit of that with one clear objective: make money and leave art to the artists. Adaptations of radio shows, crime thrillers, comedies, war films, science fiction... Mystery was nothing new to them: they had produced "The Mystery of the Mary Celeste" ("The Mystery of the Mary Celeste", 1936), with Bela Lugosi, back in 1935; quite an entertaining film, take a look. In the fifties, they had found a particularly interesting niche in what was known as scientific horror, especially after the success of "The Quatermass Xperiment" ("The Quatermass Experiment", 1955), an adaptation of Nigel Kneale's television series. Seeing that it was working, Hammer's executives asked exhibitors why that film was doing so well and received a fairly straightforward answer: "it's the horror". The audience wanted horror, so, fine: horror. And this is where the story we're interested in begins.

The really important decision was not to make another horror film, but to bring back the great monsters of classic cinema and dust off a few cobwebs. Frankenstein, Dracula, the Mummy, the Wolf Man... The old inhabitants of Universal's movies, popularized by Lugosi and Karloff, were going to return, but now they had blood in their veins, ladies with generous décolletés, very red blood and color cinematography that allowed you to appreciate every last detail of their misdeeds. Hammer had struck gold, and boy did it exploit it.

Hammer's first "Frankenstein" has something that must have been quite bewildering in 1957. The audience knew Mary Shelley's creature perfectly well through Universal's films, but here everything seemed slightly out of place. Peter Cushing played Baron Frankenstein and Christopher Lee played the creature. The former had education, manners and considerable wealth; the latter, transformed into Frankenstein's monster, seemed to stand almost eight feet tall and had an imposing physical presence, barely needing to speak to be unsettling. But there was something else: blood. Hammer understood that color could become a

weapon. Black-and-white had allowed classic horror an almost expressionistic dimension, but now wounds could take on a much more unpleasant physical presence. Flesh, corpses, eyes, lips... everything had color. And when someone got a good bite or an axe blow, the audience could see it. I repeat: in color.

> ***Lee introduces something much more physical. When he appears with bloodshot eyes and his fangs bared, the film seems to have moved from Gothic literature into the realm of bodily spectacle. This is where a fundamental element comes in: sex.***

The film had its problems with British censorship, and a good part of the critics reacted as if they had just discovered that horror movies contained horrific and/or bloody scenes (ugh, yuck!). Caroline Lejeune, a critic for The Observer, considered it one of the most repulsive films she had ever seen. The audience, however, cared considerably less about Lejeune's opinion and flocked to the cinemas. And here we find one of the constants in Hammer's history: critics took considerably longer than audiences to understand what the hell was going on. The people running the production company, of course, were laughing all the way to the bank. Hammer had discovered an audience that wanted exactly what the British guardians of good taste considered vulgar. And then Dracula arrived.

"Dracula" ("Dracula", 1958), released in 1958 and also directed by Terence Fisher, completed the formula. Christopher Lee appears dressed in a tailcoat, a red-lined cape and with the gaze of a predator, while Jonathan Harker arrives at the castle and everything starts going to hell pretty quickly. The difference from the classic Dracula is obvious from the very beginning. Bela Lugosi had created an almost hypnotic creature, theatrical, elegant to excess. Lee introduces something much more physical. When he appears with bloodshot eyes and his fangs bared, the film seems to have moved from Gothic literature into the realm of physical spectacle. And here a fundamental element comes into play: sex.

Because the vampire had always been a sexual creature, even if the old movies had to disguise it. The people in charge at Hammer, since they were already going down that road, decided that perhaps they could stop disguising it quite so much.

The women in these films wear dresses that contribute considerably to this narrative. Dracula enters their rooms at night. They sleep, he approaches. Yum, yum, bites on the neck. There is blood and there is desire in a fairly obvious mixture of eroticism and violence. Censorship allowed certain things and prohibited others, so Hammer learned to work in that strange territory where a film could suggest a great deal without showing too much. And as restrictions began to loosen during the sixties and seventies, the company progressively increased the amount of flesh on display.
The result is rather curious: Gothic horror became one of the places where British cinema could talk about sex without having to admit that it was talking about sex. The vampire became a magnificent alibi.

England Bites Itself
There is another reason why Hammer films have such a recognizable personality: they are deeply connected to a particular image of England. Castles, mansions, forests, villages, cemeteries, churches, respectable doctors, aristocrats of dubious morals and maids who know perfectly well that something strange is going on in the house, even though nobody has the decency to listen to them.

It is a Victorian England seen through the eyes of the twentieth century, with all the fascination with a past of aristocracy, sexual repression and superstition that this implies. When real England was ceasing to be an empire, Hammer began turning its imperial and Victorian past into a kind of cinematic mythology.

And there is almost always a tension between two worlds. On the one hand, we have science, reason, doctors, men who claim to know how the world works. On the other, monsters, the dead who return, vampires and forces that should have remained safely buried.

Frankenstein belongs to both worlds. He is a scientist who seeks to conquer death and ends up creating a creature that sends him the bill. Dracula represents the other extreme: the persistence of something ancient that modernity cannot eliminate. Hammer moved between these two territories with considerable ease, and that also explains the success of "The Quatermass Xperiment" ("The Quatermass Experiment", 1955) and its sequels. Before Hammer threw itself headfirst into Gothic horror, it had discovered that science could be terrifying. A scientist could open a door that should never have been opened and find something he did not understand. After that, all it took was to replace the laboratory with a castle.

This is worth pausing over, because Hammer eventually became synonymous with horror, and that can lead us to forget that, as a production company, it continued making other kinds of films. There were war films, thrillers, adventures, science fiction, comedies and literary adaptations. Even within horror, the company had a much broader repertoire than is usually remembered. There was "The Mummy" ("The Mummy", 1959), with Christopher Lee transformed into a force of nature wrapped in bandages. There was "The Hound of the Baskervilles" ("The Hound of the Baskervilles", 1959), with Cushing as Sherlock Holmes. There were "The Gorgon" ("The Gorgon", 1964), "The Reptile" ("The Reptile", 1966), "Plague of the Zombies" ("Plague of the Zombies", 1966), "The Devil Rides Out" ("The Devil Rides Out", 1968), "Taste of Fear" ("Taste of Fear", 1961) and a whole host of films that today appear as pieces of a kind of Hammer Universe, although, as a company, it produced a lot. A hell of a lot. During the sixties, it managed to maintain several production lines and agreements with American studios simultaneously. That decade was its true golden age, and here we find another interesting characteristic of Hammer: its ability to repeat a formula without necessarily making it feel like exactly the same film.

Dracula was back. Frankenstein was back. The Mummy was back. And guess who else was back? The audience, that's who. Sequels seem completely normal now, but Hammer was building a kind of cinematic universe long before anyone used that expression to



sell tickets. The production company also turned its actors into part of the spectacle. Christopher Lee and Peter Cushing became forever associated with Frankenstein and Dracula, even though both played many other characters for the company. Michael Ripper appeared in an almost absurd number of films (IMDb lists 35 appearances between 1948 and 1972), and Barbara Shelley became one of the studio's great female presences. Then, around them, there was an entire family of actors, directors, technicians and designers who could jump from one film to another.

It was a recognizable company: you saw certain sets, heard certain music, a familiar face appeared and you knew roughly where you were. Even the soundtracks contributed to this. James Bernard developed a particularly recognizable sound for Hammer, especially in the Dracula films. The wild orchestral blasts, the choirs, that kind of operatic grandeur accompanying the credits... all of it helped turn horror into spectacle.

Let's stop for a moment on something I consider fundamental: Hammer understood that fear could also have glamour. Its films are ugly when they need to be ugly, but they are also full of mansions, dresses, cars, fine wine glasses, lamps, portraits and enormous rooms. Even when someone is about to be murdered, there is a certain aesthetic satisfaction in looking around. The monster could be frightening and attractive at the same time, while the castle could be sinister and alluring.

We also have to talk about women, because Hammer was considerably more complicated than it might seem at first glance. The women in its films were often victims, lovers, vampires, witches or some combination of all four. But some of them acquired a presence that earlier British horror cinema had treated with considerably less interest.

The female body ceased to be simply something that had to be protected from the monster: it could become the monster itself. Hammer's female vampires have a much more overt sexuality than their predecessors, and throughout the sixties the studio progressively increased the erotic element. The relationship between sex and violence had been there from the beginning, but every new relaxation of censorship allowed them to push it a little further. From our perspective, the darker side of this is obvious. The films often look at these women, and at the violence inflicted upon them, through a distinctly male gaze that makes little effort to hide itself. But at the same time, it is interesting to observe how vampirism also offers a small escape route for portraying women who desire, attack, dominate and break the rules. The woman who has to behave like a respectable lady during the day can become, at night, a creature that feeds on men. Victorian society, meanwhile, looked the other way.

The problem with Hammer was that it helped change horror cinema and then had to compete with the consequences of that change. Ah, the curse of the pioneer. During the sixties, it still dominated a large part of the territory, but horror was beginning to shift. The classic monsters still worked, although audiences were beginning to have other concerns: "Night of the Living Dead" ("Night of the Living Dead", 1968), "Rosemary's Baby" ("Rosemary's Baby", 1968), "The Exorcist" ("The Exorcist", 1973), "The Texas Chain Saw Massacre" ("The Texas Chain Saw Massacre", 1974)… fear began to leave the castle. It could be in an ordinary house, in a residential neighborhood, in an apparently normal family. A demon could appear in an apartment in New York or a group of living dead could show up on a farm in Pennsylvania. Horror was becoming contemporary.

Hammer tried to follow the trend, and this is where some pretty curious films appear. I mean, genuine movies that go completely off the rails: "Dracula A.D. 1972" ("Dracula A.D. 1972", 1972) moves the Count to modern-day London. "The Satanic Rites of Dracula" ("The Satanic Rites of Dracula", 1973) takes the idea even further and turns the vampire into a kind of international villain who plans to exterminate humanity with a plague. Ahem, yes indeed: Dracula as a seventies supervillain, with scientists, conspiracies and London full of guys with sideburns. It has its charm, trust me. But it also reveals the problem: Dracula had been born in a castle and now he needed to find a place in a world of cars, nightclubs and office buildings.

By the end of the sixties, much of the American financing that had allowed the company to maintain its production pace had disappeared. Hammer carried on through deals with British production companies, while also taking advantage of the fact that censorship was becoming more relaxed. There were still interesting films to come, and some genuinely strange ones. But the world had already changed. In 1974 came "Frankenstein and the Monster from Hell" ("Frankenstein and the Monster from Hell", 1974), once again directed by Terence Fisher. In 1975, Hammer released no films. In 1976 came "To the Devil a Daughter" ("To the Devil a Daughter", 1976), and shortly afterwards the company practically disappeared from the cinematic map for years.

It seems rather fitting that the last great Frankenstein of that era brought Fisher and Cushing together once again. It meant closing the circle. Hammer had begun by bringing back the classic monsters and ended up trying to survive in a genre it had helped transform. Let me repeat: this is the truly interesting part. Hammer arrived



when classic horror seemed exhausted and gave it color. It gave it blood. It gave it sex. It gave it a more physical pace and turned the old monsters into creatures that could be exciting as well as terrifying. Then others came along and took the medals: modern gore, psychological horror, possession movies, slashers, domestic horror... much of what began developing during the sixties and seventies had something of Hammer in its DNA. The production company eventually became a brand, and a fairly easy one to imitate. Hundreds of imitations came out of it, many of them terrible, because once the formula had been discovered, all you needed was a castle, a few gorgeous young women, a guy with fangs and plenty of ketchup.

But most of them didn't understand the trick, and Hammer did. The trick was to take the absurdity seriously, to believe that Frankenstein could be an adult horror film. To shoot Dracula as if the monster could still be dangerous and genuinely frightening. To light the blood so it would show up properly. To hire actors capable of carrying a close-up, which is no easy task, and build sets that looked bigger than they really were. To unleash a full orchestra behind a man climbing through a window. And to do it over and over again.

When we watch a vampire movie today in which blood runs down a woman's neck while the monster watches her with a mixture of disgust and lust, we are seeing an image that Hammer helped cement in the popular imagination. When a scientist appears, ready to toy with death, so does that. Or when the castle is lit in a suspiciously red glow and someone utters the name Dracula, we already know what's coming. Hammer turned all of that into a language. And behind that language were three names that deserve an article of their own: Terence Fisher, Peter Cushing and Christopher Lee. That's another story.

ENTREVISTA

ASOCIACIÓN BAHÍA METAL ROCK

The strength of unity

The Bahía Metal Rock Cultural Association was founded in El Puerto de Santa María with the intention of promoting a part of the culture that does not always receive the attention it deserves, despite the fact that the province has always been a major breeding ground for bands and has attracted a significant audience. We talk about a passion for music, the need to come together and the state of the rock and metal scene, if such a scene even exists, with Marga and Lucy, president and vice president respectively of the new association.

We met a few years ago and even back then, despite your young age, you were two women who showed an unusual passion and love for music, rock and, more specifically, heavy metal. Is that still the case? How important is music in your lives?
Marga: Uff… A lot.
Lucy: For me, almost everything. The basis of my travels, my friendships...
Marga: Music is what defines my mood.

I suppose it is that passion that has led you, together with other people, to embark on this adventure. Why an association? And, above all, why now?
Marga: Why an association? Mmmm, because there is strength in unity and because, precisely, the only way to exert some pressure and make ourselves heard is by being together, and because associative work is very important. Besides, we were seeing that this kind of association is working very well in other places.
Lucy: Also, we wanted to take advantage of the fact that there were many of us with the same tastes and concerns, which brings diversity and allows us to enrich one another.
Marga: And why now? For example, I can speak from my own personal experience. I was tired of going to concerts and saying: "This band is really good for their age". We see the same old bands getting older, breaking up, cancelling tours, and the alternative is cover bands and tribute acts. I have heard "Enter Sandman" covered by every band under the sun, and not by Metallica. It has become a bit unbearable. I remember when I was a teenager, we used to go to the Casa de la Juventud, and bands that later became important, such as Sphinx and Atalaya, would play there. They were bands made up of young people who wrote their own songs and had a free space and an audience to perform them for, and that no longer exists. Now all you see are cover bands and tribute acts.
Lucy: Yes, we see how the scene is being taken over by cover bands and tribute acts. They are everywhere, while bands with their own songs have been relegated to the background, and we wanted to change that.
Marga: We have been listening to the same songs for twenty years, but there are many people doing interesting things and there needs to be a generational change.

What objectives and goals do you hope to achieve with the association?
Lucy: Well, let's see, we want to organise all kinds of cultural activities, not just concerts, but also things like exhibitions, screenings, talks, panel discussions, anything related to heavy metal and rock in general. We also want to help promote the activities that take place, because many times we have found that there is a lack of information about events taking place in one city or another and that information doesn't get through.
Marga: One of the things our members have asked for is for it to be a meeting point, in the sense that, for example, you want to go to a particular concert and you don't have a vehicle, or you don't have anyone to go with, or people with whom to share expenses, etc. The association itself can serve as a network of contacts for different things that are going on.

What specific activities have you carried out so far?
Lucy: On August 14, we opened an exhibition by Álvaro Carlier, a photographer from El Puerto who specialises in heavy metal concerts, at the Milwaukee venue in El Puerto, followed by a meta-party. We have collaborated both with the Hércules Rock Fest, which was held in Cádiz, at the Soho venue, and featured young bands from Cádiz (Hole-Moss, Samsara, Fuera de Órbita), and with the second edition of Arrock Progresivo, also held at the Milwaukee in El Puerto, which featured bands such as the Japanese band Baraka, Glazz and the band Mientras Las Abejas Duermen from Ubrique.
Marga: The idea is to look at rock and heavy metal from a more holistic point of view, as a cultural phenomenon in every respect, right? In other words, there are films about heavy metal, there are books about heavy metal, there are documentaries or graphic works such as exhibitions, etc., about heavy metal. There are more things besides concerts. Limiting ourselves to concerts seemed a bit restrictive.

Let's go back to the association's name, Bahía Metal Rock Cultural Association. Even in the days when rock dominated the charts, metal in general and classic heavy metal in particular were niche genres. Don't you sometimes feel a bit like Don Quixote tilting at windmills?
Marga: Yes.
Lucy: Well, it's not exactly popular music, but there are, for example, summer festivals that have quite a strong following. That's one area where we want to put some pressure on the institutions, so they can see that El Puerto de Santa María could become a reference point within the genre, like Cartagena or Viveiro, and become a draw for this kind of festival.
Marga: I think the metal audience is a small one, but very loyal. Any of us has travelled all over Spain and even abroad to see our favourite band. So, we may be few, but we'll go anywhere, and we'll go all out.

Within that loyalty to heavy metal, or metal in general, there has always been a certain degree of snobbery or purism, right? As if, if something doesn't fit within the classic sound of the particular genre you like, then it's no longer acceptable, or, put another way, you lose interest in it. Are you willing, as an association, to fight against that?
Lucy: Absolutely. We consciously chose the name Bahía Metal Rock because we are open to any style within the broad spectrum of rock.
Marga: It's true that what you're talking about can exist, but you have to be open to everything. There's a band in Gibraltar that mixes metalcore with flamenco elements. There are Norwegian black metal bands with flamenco guitar solos. We can't close ourselves off to anything.
Lucy: In fact, there's a world of difference between the two of us, stylistically speaking. She's into death metal and black metal, while I'm much more into hard rock and AOR, so we're an example of how all tastes have a place here.
We've been talking about the scene throughout, but if we take a real snapshot of it, what do we actually find?
Marga: I think it's a diamond mine in the rough.

Lucy: There are quite a few bands, but perhaps they're missing the right platform to make themselves heard.
Marga: The audience is looking elsewhere while there are so many people making really good music in a very interesting and original way.
Lucy: For me, it's a source of pride that bands from here like The Electric Alley or Sauron, or previously Sphinx, are succeeding wherever they go.

It is impossible to talk about a scene if it is not sustained by people, active people who attend events, go to concerts and turn it into something broader that transcends the music itself. Do you think that happens nowadays? Is there really an audience for all these bands that are increasingly emerging?
Lucy: I think so.
Marga: I think so too. Look, in the short time we've been around and with the few things we've been able to organise, one of the biggest surprises has been the turnout and the reception we've received. We expected to be four people and that would be it, and we already have almost fifty members. What sometimes happens is that information gets spread across different channels and doesn't reach people properly.
Lucy: Look, when big concerts come to town, such as ZZ Top or Helloween, that's when I realise there are so many like-minded people out there, and those are the people we need to reach.

Of course, but those kinds of events will always attract all kinds of audiences. After that, it doesn't really help if more underground or younger bands don't have a space where they can showcase themselves.
Marga: We need to support them. I think it's partly our responsibility as an audience to do that and support local bands. Sometimes you spend fifteen euros on drinks while complaining about everything, when you could just as easily spend that money supporting your friend or some band that is working their ass off writing songs.
Lucy: Besides, Iron Maiden became a huge band because people supported them when they were starting out. We don't know where the Iron Maidens of the future might be.

Have you been in contact with any other associations like yours? Is there that kind of symbiosis between people in different places who share the same concerns?
Marga: Yes, yes. We've been in contact and, well, we've already collaborated with other associations in Seville and Burgos that have the same objectives as us.
Lucy: In Granada and Huelva, Barcelona, and, within the province, we're in contact with La Hoguera in Jerez.
Marga: Yes, we've been talking with La Hoguera and we think they have a very interesting association project. Hopefully we can work together and establish a partnership, because, as we said before, there is strength in unity.

Let's open up an important can of worms. What role does women currently play in heavy metal?



Lucy: Well, look, I could tell you that, at least within our association, there are a lot of women, almost more than men, so our role is very significant. You might have the impression that heavy metal is something very male-oriented, but there are lots of women.
Marga: And if you look at the bands, there are more and more bands with women in them. In fact, I really like extreme metal, and it's surprising how many new Spanish extreme metal bands are fronted by women, with a vocal ability that goes from guttural to lyrical in a way you don't see with men. In that respect, we are moving forward, but it's true that music is no exception to other aspects of social life.
Lucy: You can see it very clearly in the audience as well. Compared with when I was younger, you see many women at concerts who aren't necessarily there because they are someone's "girlfriend", but because they genuinely like it and enjoy it.

Another major battle within rock is the much-talked-about "generational change". How do you see this issue? Are there currently Lucis and Dorians we can trust with the future?
Lucy: I see a lot of people our age, and there are younger people too. Perhaps not as many as when we were sixteen or seventeen, but more and more people are joining in. And, above all, there are some very young bands doing a fantastic job, so I don't think rock will ever die.
Marga: It's true that sometimes it isn't encouraged, but I see a lot of teenagers who start out listening to whatever they have at home, and bands like Linkin Park or System of a Down are having a resurgence in that respect. What we do have now are many more resources, with the internet and the ability to listen to all the music they want. That's partly what we want to do through the association, introduce people to this style of music so that it can reach a wider audience and that generational change can happen.

I see a situation that is quite common nowadays, or at least as far as I can see, which is that there are indeed many very young bands, but, nevertheless, you don't see quite as much of that youth among the audience.
Marga: Well, then you go to festivals and you do see a lot of teenagers. Thirteen- and fourteen-year-old kids wearing T-shirts of their favourite bands, and we see that they have their own space too.

Speaking of festivals, we see millions of euros in public money being squandered every year on major sponsorships for festivals whose cultural interest is highly questionable, while small venues are bleeding to death. Is that the biggest challenge?
Lucy: Yes, of course. As an association, we also try to involve local bars and businesses that want to and are able to collaborate with everything we organise, whether by providing their spaces or in any other way. The intention is always to support local venues.
Marga: We've received a lot of input from small venues, not just here in El Puerto, but also from other cities, offering their support and letting us know that we can count on them, and that they are interested in what we might do in the future. In the end, as they say: think locally, act globally. We believe it's essential to build a network of contacts that creates a circuit.
Lucy: We've also contacted promoters, not just venues, because we're interested in finding out how we can establish that kind of support and, in that way, build what we're talking about, a circuit not only at a local level, but between provinces.

Well, to wrap things up, what will be the next event where the Bahía Metal Rock Association will be present?
Lucy: Next September 19, we'll also be collaborating with a mini-festival taking place in Jerez, at La Guarida del Ángel, featuring the bands Shalom, Stigia and Guadaña. Doors open at 8:30 p.m. and tickets are fourteen euros in advance and eighteen euros at the door, and we hope to see all of you there.
Marga: We also encourage you to follow us on social media, and anyone who finds this interesting and would like to join the association can do so. The membership fee is fifteen euros per quarter, although we are working with various local businesses and promoters to secure agreements that offer certain benefits at clothing shops, concert tickets, etc.

Well, thank you very much for the conversation, and we wish you great success with the association and hope the local scene continues to grow thanks to your work.

Marcos Sánchez

Tarja Turunen
From Cold Finland to Sunny Andalusia



Tarja Turunen is a Finnish vocalist who for many years was considered one of the queens of metal, especially during her time fronting Nightwish. Her time with the Finnish band came to an abrupt end years ago, more than twenty years ago. Since then, she has never stopped releasing all kinds of albums. Last June, she released her new work, "Frisson Noir", and the Metal 'N Rock Radio team contacted her husband and manager, Marcelo, to send him a series of questions focusing on the release of her new CD, the heaviest of her solo career.

On June 12, you release your new album, "Frisson Noir", a record that promises to be very ambitious. It is your first rock album since 2019. Why has it taken you so long?
It has been more or less seven years since my last album, yes, it seems like a long time, but I have kept myself very busy. I have released different kinds of albums, there was an electronic album with Outlanders, also a Christmas album, live albums and my greatest hits album, which kept me very busy on the road. We also lived through COVID, when everything came to a standstill. It has been seven years, yes, it seems like a long time, but it went by very quickly.

We have just listened to your first single, the epic "At Sea", a ten-minute track. Why choose such a long song to introduce the album? Could it be a summary of what the new album is about?
It is a long song, yes, ten minutes. It might seem like a risky move on my part and on the part of the record label, but I am really not afraid of making these kinds of bold moves at all. It is a beautiful song, one with a huge orchestra, choirs and my band playing. A beautiful story as well, and the elements of this song are going to be the same ones that can be heard on the album. However, not all the songs on the album are this long, although some will be somewhat long. But it is a great beginning. It is a kind of striking opening to the journey through my new album, and it seems that people are really appreciating it.

It has been mentioned in the promotion that this is going to be your heaviest album. What is behind the shift towards heavier sounds?
I missed that heavy sound on my albums, because when I play live I have a band with me that always sounds heavy and powerful, which is what the drums, guitars and bass bring. They give me this really good drive and support for my great voice. So I wanted to work with a mixing engineer who would really give me that, who would be able to give me that heavier and more aggressive sound. And that person is Neil Avron, from Los Angeles. I loved working with him even though we worked remotely. Yes, he really achieved this beautiful, heavy sound on my album. I am very, very happy with how it sounds.

You made your solo debut in 2007, almost twenty years ago. Looking back, where would you place this new "Frisson Noir"? Does it draw on any of your previous work?
"Firsson Noir" is definitely an album that represents me today. I think all my albums have represented me at the time they were released. My work has everything to do with me, the environment I am in, the people I work with. People are one of my greatest inspirations nowadays, I love writing about their stories and I love travelling and so, this new album represents me and my passion. It represents the freedom I have today to work with music, as a songwriter, as an artist, I feel very comfortable and confident. So I think, and I want to believe, that it is my best work so far.

Listening to the preview "At Sea", at times it feels as though you are taking us into the soundtrack of a very epic film. Are you a fan of film scores? Do you have a favourite composer?
I love film scores, they have been an inspiration to me for a long time. Even for my first album, "My Winter Storm", I went to Los Angeles to work at Hans Zimmer's studios, where he was recording and mixing. I got to work with some of his trusted people, so it is a very important genre of music for me and one that I am really following. Hans Zimmer, I love his work, Craig Armstrong is another great composer I like. Yes, I would love to work in the world of film scores, whether writing my compositions for a film score for a movie or a series or anything of that kind. I would love to do that. That would be a great challenge, but it would be lovely.

We have seen that on this new album you are going to have some important collaborations, such as Dani Filth from

Cradle Of Filth, your friend Marko Hietala, people from Apocalyptica and Chad Smith from the Red Hot Chili Peppers. How did these collaborations come about? How did you get Chad Smith, a musician somewhat removed from your style?
Marko Hietala promised to collaborate on my album when I recorded my parts for his song "Left on Mars" a couple of years ago. So we made a deal, I said to him: okay, if I do this for you, you will do the same for me, and he did. And I wrote a song called "Leap of Faith" thinking of him. Actually, for the first time I wrote a song from scratch, knowing that he was going to be there as my duet partner, so the whole songwriting process was different in that sense. Dani Filth came to my mind when I was recording demo vocals for "I Don't Care", a song where I wanted someone drastically different from me to accompany me. I have been following Dani's career, his incredible journey with his band and how he has created a brand for himself. It is a band that I really admire, and he is a perfect match for this song because it is very direct, a heavy song. It was beautiful working with him, he was a real gentleman. With Apocalyptica, we have been friends for a long time.

The Finnish music industry is small, so we have known each other for a very, very long time, and over the last few years we have been talking about doing something together and finally, I was able to make my dream come true. I presented my tango song to them and they loved it, it is a very beautiful collaboration. The cello is a sound I have always liked. And then there is Chad Smith. It may sound strange, perhaps, but he was already on board for the sessions for the album "Shadows Self" many years ago. So he had already recorded other songs for that album and he came on board because at that time I was working with bassist Kevin Chow, who had been doing some kind of improvisational band with Chad. He asked me one day if I would like to work with Chad and I said: of course, I would absolutely love to, and so he recorded. This song, "Against the Odds", is from a long time ago, so we kept those sessions and now I have finished working on the song. I wrote the melodies and the lyrics and yes, it is a beautiful ending to the album.

It seems hard to believe, but you have been a top-level vocalist for thirty years, time really does fly. What routines do you follow to take care of your voice?
Yes, thirty years. It seems like a long time. In fact, it is a long time. I am very, very grateful to still be living my dream in music. Being a classical singer is like a lifestyle. It is a life choice, it means that I have had to sacrifice some things in my life. I really need to take care of myself, my body, my mind. I need to train my voice constantly. Just as any instrumentalist needs to keep training to stay in shape with an instrument, it is the same with my voice. I need to keep training. Taking care of yourself is the most important thing, you know? Of course, there are good days, there are bad days, as everyone has, but it would be a nightmare for me to see or feel that I have gone backwards in my training or that I feel worse when singing. I still want to keep progressing, I am taking singing lessons and I want to keep moving forward. I think this will never, ever end.

We have been experiencing a boom in female singers over the past few years. We assume you are friends with quite a few of them, such as Sharon Den Adel. Who do you get along with best? Who would you like to collaborate with? Have you ever thought about making an album featuring only female guests? It would be really cool.
Yes, I know many women in the industry. I am very, very happy for them. There are many more nowadays than when I started thirty years ago. I felt very alone back then, but there is still much more room for more female vocalists and musicians in the industry, absolutely. To be honest, I really have not been thinking about making an album with only women. Uh, not yet, it is not on my mind at the moment. And my mind is occupied with many other things, but I do have female friends and I love supporting my colleagues.

You have been living in Andalusia for quite a few years now. How did you end up here? How did you discover our part of the world? What do you like most about living here?
Yes, we have been living in Andalusia for a few years. We really love living here, we love the light that greets us when we wake up in the morning. Ah, I love the food, I love the people, I really enjoy living here and we found a beautiful home, I am very grateful for that. I also included some of this, some of your culture, in my new album. There are flamenco guitars playing on a song called "Anemoia". It is my way of thanking Spanish culture. And, to be honest, the first time we came to the area was to meet some friends who were already living here, and we basically fell in love with it and decided to move. We came from Buenos Aires to Andalusia.

As you know, we are writing to you from nearby Granada. Our programme, for example, is broadcast on the radio station in Atarfe, where the Atarfe Vega Rock festival used to be held. We know you regularly visit Sierra Nevada. What do you think of our city? Have you visited anywhere else apart from the ski resort?
Beautiful Granada. I have walked around the streets of Granada several times. Basically, every winter we go to Sierra Nevada to ski at least a few times. I am so happy that my daughter also learned to ski. I was almost born with skis on my feet in Finland, but I still have not been able to visit the Alhambra. It would be wonderful someday, but it is very difficult to get tickets. But the city is beautiful, gorgeous. I like the food, the people and the atmosphere is lovely. Granada has everything. So yes, I love Granada. Very much.

Metal 'N Rock Radio



DANI LLAMAS DON MARIANI THE SOULBREAKER COMPANY THE SURROYAL GLEN HANSARD THE THUNDERBEATS

"...we are ugly but we have the music".

ROCK BOTTOM MAGAZINE



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The Surroyal

Postmodern pop-rock madness