

Dagaz Music :: Almost ten years went by since your first release as Strength Through Joy. How do you feel those years?



Richard Leviathan :: The last decade represents the formative years of my youth. When I was 20, before I even picked up a guitar or recorded a song, I had this idea that I had to do something artistically by the time I was 25. That goal was achieved and Strength Through Joy was the first fruit. Our emergence on the scene was very quick and, for a first release, the debut Strength Through Joy album was a success. It put us on the map and has continued to inspire others in the scene to this day. I can never forget how significant that period was. It is the root of everything I now do. Of course, a lot has changed in this time and the struggle goes on and on.

Dagaz Music :: Strength Through Joy was your first approach to the musical scene?

Richard Leviathan :: Yes. We had written a number of songs that did not find their way to CD but there was nothing serious before STJ. Timothy was a bassist in a Goth band in Dublin before I knew him but they never released anything.

Dagaz Music :: What is your background in music? Did you study music?

Richard Leviathan :: I have no formal training in music at all and fell by accident into it at the relatively late age of 21. All I had to begin with was a capable singing voice. It was only when I met Timothy that my musical adventure began. I wrote lyrics and synth parts for STJ but it was only much later that I picked up a guitar and started learning Death in June songs. The first song I wrote by myself was 'Wolf Wind' which appeared on the KAPO! CD. So, you could say that I am a latecomer to music.

Dagaz Music :: Your first release 'Dark Rose' was like a Douglas P. presentation. How important was Douglas at that time?

Richard Leviathan :: Extremely important! Death in June was the musical and aesthetic inspiration behind STJ and the song 'Grave for Burning Wings' was a genuine collaboration of lyrics and music that occasionally works so beautifully. I was not entirely happy with releasing the single because it does not fully represent the first STJ album but at least we got to release something on vinyl.

Dagaz Music :: On the same year, 1994, comes out your first full length 'The Force Of Truth And Lies'. Also on that first recording the influence of Douglas P. is very

noticeable. In some way the idea that you were a disciple of Douglas P. stands out. How, at that time, did you predict the evolution of Strength Through Joy?

Richard Leviathan :: Douglas only agreed to produce STJ because he thought it was original even though his influence on the production and the style of the music is obvious. Having never been into a studio it was difficult to predict the final outcome but I always knew that STJ would have a kind of epic sound in which the guitars, keyboards and vocals would complement each other well.



Dagaz Music :: What was your basic motivation to record that first CD?

Richard Leviathan :: To fulfil the opportunity that had been offered to us and to bring our early material out into the open to let it breathe. As I mentioned earlier, I sought to achieve something by the time I was 25 and the CD was recorded a year earlier, so it really was a dream come true.

Dagaz Music :: On that CD you mention and adapt a poem from the Irish nationalist revolutionary Joseph Plunkett. Why that homage to such a controversial person?

Richard Leviathan :: This was the song 'Rosin Dubh' (Dark Rose) which Timothy wrote. The words are derived from a poem written by Plunkett shortly before he was executed in the 1916 uprising in Dublin. It is a very moving piece full of pathos and tragic heroism. Timothy is Irish so, for him, Plunkett would be less controversial than others may assume. Today those Martyrs are less revered than they once were – perhaps because the cult of martyrdom has become so degraded by suicide missions of another kind.

Dagaz Music :: About one year later comes out a double CD – Salute to Light – that for me is one of the 90's best editions. It makes us feel that your relation with Timothy was stronger than ever. You were both quite enthusiastic with the STJ project, weren't you?

Richard Leviathan :: Yes, our partnership reached its peak with that record and we enjoyed recording it. Having produced one album, it was great to be able to do a sequel and create a degree of longevity for the project.

Dagaz Music :: More obviously than on the first CD, here you make a lot of references to the European heritage, like nostalgia. What is your aim when acclaiming those ancient times?

Richard Leviathan :: It was a sentiment that was ingrained from the beginning, a sense of the past as a deep well of memory in which we can find both sadness and glory, the two often mixed together. Of course, this was also a characteristic of Death in June and related groups, so we were following a new tradition that was conscious of the Occidental soul and the ambivalence of history as the dark thread of fate. I don't seek to re-create the spirit of other times but to invoke their legacy in the cold light of today.



Dagaz Music :: The way that this edition is presented is very curious. The same tracks on both CDs but with different interpretations. One would say that each CD is the vision of each one of the musicians. Did that happen that way?

Richard Leviathan :: We had composed so many instrumental and vocal parts for each song that when we stripped them back for mixing, Douglas suggested that we do a few remixes. From this the second disc emerged and its effect was quite astounding. It is quite nicely reflected in the artwork where the yellow and black suns seem to illustrate the two sides of the album.



Dagaz Music :: In spite of some appearances in compilations, Strength Through Joy ended on the same year of your collaboration with Douglas P. in the release of 'KAPO!'. Was your move to Australia responsible for the fall of STJ?

Richard Leviathan :: Actually, it was in Australia that the whole thing began. Timothy and I were living in Adelaide and when we wrote to Death in June to ask for permission to send a demo, we received a letter back informing us that Douglas was living about 12 km away! STJ continued until 1997 after the long tours we did with DIJ and NON. Timothy moved to Germany and was worried about the name Strength Through Joy being officially banned in that country (at least in its original form – Kraft Durch Freude). At the same time, this was also the beginning of the end of our partnership as the link between us started to wane and I was compelled to become the driving force behind the project that eventually became Ostara.



Dagaz Music :: For many Douglas P. and Death In June fans this collaboration was like a rebirth of the DIJ sonorities. My impression is that recording it was a special moment of inspiration. How do you view those recordings now?

Richard Leviathan :: It has a very special atmosphere, gloomy yet darkly heroic, full of lament yet bold in its undertones. It is one of those experimental albums that

remains a milestone and I have noticed that its recent re-release is receiving a lot of positive attention. It represents a Grey Area of music in which interesting things happen. Bleak poetry at its best!

Dagaz Music :: As far as I remember, at that time you made a long European Tour. How do you remember those concerts?

Richard Leviathan :: Most of them were really good because we worked well as a group and the discipline was strong, stronger even than some of the Ostara performances because of the tightly knit partnership we had. The experience was amazing and we covered about 15 countries in two years. Apart from being able to perform with and in Death in June, we had a fantastic time meeting the fans and sharing thoughts and ideas. There were some perilous moments, such as when our tour bus was firebombed in Frankfurt, but that is all part of the explosive package of post-industrial apocalyptic music, as we know to this day!



Dagaz Music :: Almost four years went by until we listened to a new work (2000). A new project called Ostara. Before I listened to it for the first time, I thought that it was a personal project; I was quite surprised when I noticed that Timothy was also on it. Why that change of name? And why Ostara?

Richard Leviathan :: I wrote most of the material for Ostara and Timothy's presence was limited. We had to come up with a new name after we decided to ditch STJ. I loved the old name and felt obliged to come up with a suitable alternative. I don't think that Timothy was aware at first that Ostara was just as risky as its predecessor! But, it stood out for me as a name that I had to have and complements the new style and nature of the music I have been doing since the first Ostara CD.



Dagaz Music :: As far as I was able to verify, this was also your first collaboration with Marco Deplano. How did you meet him?

Richard Leviathan :: I met him in Rome on our way to Torino in 1997. It was one of the best shows of the tour and Marco was extremely enthusiastic. We have remained in close contact ever since. He has great knowledge and imagination and his participation in a number of extreme scenes and projects was very intriguing to

me. I will never forget the time when we were sitting in a pub on Marcus Garvey Road in Brixton, London talking about the Nazis when Marco pointed out the fact that we were the only whites in the building and suggested that should change our topic of conversation!!!

Dagaz Music :: In 'Secret Homeland' you bring your lyrics to the foreground. The music is much more a support for your poems than before. Would you care to explain the process of composing Ostara music?

Richard Leviathan :: It varies. I sometimes start with a text or I write lyrics to suit a piece of music. Lyrics are always central to anything I do and I am more a wordsmith than anything else.

Dagaz Music :: What were, at that time, your worries and yearnings that you wanted to put on your lyrics? What were the words that you think that we should hear?

Richard Leviathan :: It is hard to deconstruct the writing process and analyse it objectively. A lot of it is intuitive and stems from what I am before I even attempt to understand what this truly is. I am drawn to certain themes that recur in my writing and a certain aesthetics that pervades the Ostara image. There is a melancholy spirit to the words and music that expresses a longing for eternity in the face of death but I don't want to define the character of the music too strictly.

Dagaz Music :: Two years were necessary for you to release another full length, 'Kingdom Gone'. Those were quite troubled years; the problems with World Serpent and consequent change of label.

Richard Leviathan :: Yes, it was difficult because Timothy left Ostara a month before the album was released. We also had to endure a long embargo on earnings from WSD that has still not been fully resolved. It was Stephan Pockrandt from the label Eis&Licht who proved to be a real blessing in the face of disaster and I firmly believe that the second Ostara album superseded the first one both in terms of songs and production. I regard it as the beginning of a higher stage in the development of Ostara.



Dagaz Music :: Although the Ostara is you and Timothy and the credits of the recording are in both your names, you show in concerts alone. It looks as the end of a collaboration of almost ten years.

Richard Leviathan :: Our partnership ended officially in 2002 so we had been going for about 8 years. I had to find session musicians for the short tour we did

that year and it was a bit of a compromise. Fortunately I am now moving back towards a more closely integrated live band.

Dagaz Music :: Musically this CD is a step forward into more pop sonorities. It was your intention to make Ostara sound more consensual?

Richard Leviathan :: Yes and No. I didn't consciously aim to make the sound more pop-oriented. It just happened and I was pleased by what I was hearing. I now like the idea of writing accessible tunes with complex lyrics – it seems like quite an original thing to do.

Dagaz Music :: More recently also came out a Foresta Di Ferro full length. Marco Deplano and John Murphy are your comrades on these more dark feelings. Is this project, in any way, a replacement or continuity of the work you did with Douglas in KAPO!?

Richard Leviathan :: Yes, it does resemble the KAPO! album to some extent but I think that Marco has given it a peculiar essence that is both very Italian and bombastic, something you don't find on KAPO! at all. With spoken word, it is possible to delve more deeply into the realm of the mind whereas lyrics tend to reflect certain moods that touch on what is ultimately wordless.



Dagaz Music :: I particularly enjoyed 'On The Marble Cliffs'. Can you talk a little bit about that particular track?

Richard Leviathan :: It is a piece I originally wrote in 1996 for KAPO! but it has endured through the years to reflect the times. It was based on the events of the recent Balkan wars with certain allusions to WW2. With Ostara and FDF, we adapted it to the themes of Palestine and 9/11 adding a few new lines and changing the context of its presentation.

Dagaz Music :: The most recent Ostara full length 'Ultima Thule' came out by the end of 2003 with a completely remodelled line-up. Ostara is now you and Stu Mason. Was this an intentional line-up? Were you looking for the right person to help you create the sound you were looking for or did you meet Mason by chance?



Richard Leviathan :: After 'Kingdom Gone' I needed to work with new musicians and was keen to find a collaborator who could assist me with the

arrangements. I advertised on the web and Stu Mason was the only truly viable candidate among many others. He is a talented guitarist and composer and has embraced Ostara enthusiastically while adding an electronic dimension that is innovative and very contemporary.

Dagaz Music :: In this CD appears a sentence – ‘only ruins last forever’ – is this motto for this new Ostara sound?



Richard Leviathan :: I am not sure. The line could apply to everything in life. What isn't destroyed is altered and that which alters also destroys.

Dagaz Music :: More pop or even more rock. Do you accept these descriptions for this 'Ultima Thule'?

Richard Leviathan :: I *did* want to move towards a more Rock orientation if only to give the sound a harder, more aggressive edge without losing the element of subtlety that has always been a feature of Ostara. So, yes, I accept your description in the best possible terms!

Dagaz Music :: Can you speak a little bit about the lyrics of this renewed Ostara? What are your yearnings these years?

Richard Leviathan :: I have been seeking a less cerebral and more visceral



perspective on life, which is one of the reasons why I wrote 'Diva de Sade', a song that explores erotic themes very overtly. The recent war in the Gulf and the continuing violence in the world as a whole definitely impinged on the lyrics, making me realise how fragile all our cultural ivory towers can be. I am becoming more and more

aware of the necessity to create a distance between the self and the world in order to remain sane. So, as a result, the songs speak of loneliness, exile and disaffection in both positive and negative ways. The song 'Nightmare Machines' is based on Leni Riefenstahl who died shortly after it was written and this gave the piece an added poignancy. All in all, this is my most melancholic work augmented by a more powerful instrumentation that prevents it from sliding totally into sonic despair!

Dagaz Music :: Now with this new CD out do intent to play it live? With a new line-up?

Richard Leviathan :: The line-up is essentially the same as the album, a return to how things should be.

Dagaz Music :: Do you already have dates for forthcoming concerts?

Richard Leviathan :: Yes, we play in Germany on the 20th of March (Ostara Eve) at the Lichttaufe festival, in Italy (Scandiano) on the 27th of March and in Spain on the 2nd and 3rd of April (Madrid and Vittoria). I hope to then do a short tour of the USA.

Dagaz Music :: The year ended a few days ago and, in my opinion, it was a very fruitful year with a lot of interesting releases. Can you point out for us a few of the records that, for you, were really important last year?

Richard Leviathan ::



Marilyn Manson – Golden Age of Grottesque (brilliant for its use of cabaret style narcissism)

Placebo – Sleeping With Ghosts (full of strong vibes and rich melodies)

Johnny Cash – The Man Comes Around (his last ever work full to the brim with foreboding)

Elend – Winds Devouring Men (an amazing neoclassical release on Prophecy Productions)

Dagaz Music :: Any last words for the readers?

Richard Leviathan :: All the best for 2004.