

Interview with Sascha of the German Death Metal band MANDATORY (October 18th, 2008)

Conducted by Kunal N. Choksi for Diabolical Conquest.com (D.C.)

DC: Hello Sascha! How are you doing? What are you up to these days?

Sascha: Thx for the interview bro! I am preparing mixing the new album "Adrift Beyond" and writing/recording new music. Business as usual. (Note: This interview was done before the decision of mixing at Sunlight Studio).

DC: How does it feel being regarded as one of the best active death metal demo bands in the underground? Though formed in 2001, your band has released only demos so far, four of them if I'm not mistaken. Why the release of so many demos before Mandatory could record a proper album? Would you advise a new band to record a few demos first?

Sascha: We actually recorded a first album in 2003 but due to problems with the mixing studio we got problems with the files and finally lost interest in the album after a few months. Basically it was nothing else but the first MCD "Divine Destruction" plus 3 more songs we recorded some weeks after releasing the MCD. On our new compilation "Exiled In Pain" you get all of these previously unreleased songs. So, you can say you get our never released first album with a lot of bonus tracks in that package.

As for your second question: Hell yes! You should do at least one or two demos to get more skilled at songwriting and especially arranging songs. All of the great bands did some demos before their first album. And when you listen to these demos today you know it was right to take this way.

DC: Mandatory's sound has progressed from a Morgoth-influenced one on the early demos to a more rounded and satisfying, even a tad original one on your latest demo, Where They Bleed. What was the reason behind that perceptible shift in sound?

Sascha: To be honest: We never ever tried to achieve the Morgoth-sound and except for the vocals we do not sound like them I think. If there have been any bands that influenced us in terms of sound, these bands are the Swedish old school bands like Unleashed, Grave, Dismember, Nihilist, Edge Of Sanity, Cemetary and Desultory. On the second MCD "Curse Of The Undead" we went for a more brutal sound in the American vein but with a more Asphyx/Deicide-like edge to it. But don't get me wrong: It's not that we sit there before writing new songs and wonder: "Oh well, what should we sound like on the new record? Which band could we copy this time?". We just write what we want to write in that special moment. And of course, if you listen to a lot of let's say Finnish Death Metal, you could sound a bit like those bands. In any case, we are NOT one of those bands trying to come up with something new or trendy each time. We just write what we love to hear. Sometimes it's absolutely old school, sometimes it's mixed with some different rhythm or lead work. You get the keys here, the acoustic guitars there. There is no strict formula for writing a MANDATORY song.

DC: With Mandatory's impending full-length album around the corner, are you afraid of losing your "best active demo band" status. What can you tell us about your new album, 'Adrift Beyond'? Now don't tell us what it exactly sounds like and make it easy for us reviewers, but do tell us about the music direction your band is taking for that one. Is it going to sound different from the songs we heard on 'Where they Bleed'?

Sascha: Well, it's hard to tell you about the direction without naming some bands or influences you can hear in the songs. But I will do my best. Let me have a try: As I said before, we are not trying to be "something mega new". We are DM-fans and have always been listening to the great albums ourselves. As you pointed out, we changed our sound over the years. Our intended sound, however, was the one you can hear on "Where They Bleed". I think you could say that our first MCD is closer to that style than the second one. I would also say for the new album we went just in the same direction but we managed to create a really varying album in my point of view. First you will get some interesting acoustic pieces again. We also made use of more sick keys as well as thick and rolling rhythm work. You will find some extremely fat "groovy" parts in there as well. No NuMetal of course, just .. well.. groove. I personally think the album is more extreme in any part than the releases before as it features really slow AND fast songs. The same for the track lengths – some fast as shit, some slow and long stuff. Very melodic here, old school hell there. Overall, the only album I can recall having a similar mixture is "The Spectral Sorrows" by E.O.S. If you loved this and "Where They Bleed", you will also like "Adrift Beyond". And of course, you will get a killer artwork!

DC: Indeed, most of your artworks have been killer and are pretty much how death metal artworks should be. Any idea which artist will be creating the artwork for 'Adrift Beyond'? Do you have a particular idea or theme for it relating to the album name or lyrics or something?

Sascha: I do not want to sound like swanking but I think I can say: "Adrift Beyond" will feature one THE best cover artworks ever to be released in Death Metal. Yes, we got SV Bell for the artwork who also did covers for Amorphis, Kataklysm, Morta Skuld and Oppressor! Let me tell you: It looks like a lost Seagrave-cover !! It absolutely rules!

DC: The production on the Mandatory demos has mostly been good and that's something you can't say for many demos. Forget demos, even great albums have been ruined because of a shoddy production job. All of Mandatory's demos have been recorded by the band and most of them at the Show No Mercy studio. Could you throw some light on that fact? And is the new album going to be recorded at the same place by the band again?

Sascha: Oh let me correct that: ONLY ONE demo has been recorded here and that is "Where They Bleed". "Divine Destruction" was recorded at Flammenmeer Studio and "Curse Of The Undead" was recorded by ourselves but NOT at Show No Mercy Studio. [Okay yeah, 'Curse of the Undead' was "remastered" at that studio, not recorded - KC] The new album was completely recorded here and I think we will also mix it here but that's still not certain, yet, as we also think about Swanö. We will see. I do not want to make any promises that I can keep. As for the songs on "Exiled In Pain": You will find three more songs there which we recorded at Show No Mercy Studio some years ago. But that was in a hurry and so I think the production could have been way better. But the production on the new album will blow them all up anyway.

DC: Which bands made you want to pick up the instruments? You have covered songs of Razor and Repulsion. Did they by any chance influence Mandatory members to do that?

Sascha: No. Of course, we love bands like Razor, Exciter, Repulsion or Onslaught. But the bands that made us pick up our axes or drum sticks are the typical bands like Maiden, GnR, Priest, Slayer, perhaps the early 90s DM bands.. Even some Pop stuff.. old school 60/70s Rock.. Hendrix, Clapton, Stones... you know that kind of acts.

DC: Is it necessary for all Mandatory members to have a strong respect and affection towards the old style of death metal or is it that they can like other forms of music as well as long as they don't bring those influences into Mandatory's music?

Sascha: Absolutely! We all listen to a lot of different styles of music. And I think most Death Metal maniacs would not like everything what they could find in our CD/LP collections, haha. I personally also listen to a lot of Hard Rock, AOR, Blues, Pop or even Country and Jazz. Of course we also like our daily Hendrix, Status Quo, ZZ Top, The Who, Johnny Cash or whatsoever.. But while writing for MANDATORY we never ever will throw in some Country lick or Pop phrase. And you will also never hear any clean vocals on a MANDATORY album. So, everyone in the band has his preferences in music but ALL of us love old school Death Metal, be it Swedish, British, American, French, Australian.. whatsoever..

DC: I understand you have been trying to sell your band's material on eBay - why that medium of distribution? Isn't it tedious to sell your demos this way instead of asking other labels to distribute it? What do you think of others buying limited copies of releases in bulk and selling them one by one on eBay at a substantial profit?

Sascha: I do not have a problem with Ebay. Everyone can sell his stuff there. We have a distributing label in Australia, Asphyxiate Recordings, which does a great job. But as it is with all underground Death Metal, you get your royalties and need to sell them to get some cash which you can use for future mixing sessions or cover artworks you need to pay for. So why not on Ebay? Ebay is the only forum giving me the opportunity to sell a CD to some unknown person in let's say Tibet. Or Chile. Or Canada. Or India [Woohoo! - KC]. What I do not like is trading. Slay me for my point of view on that topic but I do not need to trade in my beloved MANDATORY CD for some underground sloppy shitty Black Metal which I can not sell in lightyears. So, I will continue selling MANDATORY's CDs there until we get a big deal with a distributor that does this job professionally.

DC: Since you yourself are sending out stuff to people around the world, you might be in a decent position to answer these questions. How is the censorship in Germany at present? What do you think would happen if I were to mail you a parcel with an Indian Swastika marking on it?

Sascha: Uuuh difficult topic!

Well, first off, I would never like to get a parcel with an Indian Swastika marking or any other Nazi shit. I am German. So I can teach most NSBM or Nazi music maniacs out

there a lot about our history but I won't do that as they could never understand it. Only so much: Censorship in Germany is as shitty as in all other countries. But in most cases it's correct. We do not need Nazi stuff, we do not need pictures and music about cutting a woman's vagina. Who needs that?!? A 15-year old Cannibal Corpse fan needs that. Ok, I know there are a lot of them out there but as long as you ask MANDATORY: We do not need that. I have never experienced problems with our censorship so far. Only a funny thing on Ebay when they ended an auction for the "Let Them Eat Metal" –CD by THE RODS that shows this woman in dessous biting in a gold Metal dildo. Haha.. But ok that cover got censored 25 years ago. So, I can understand it. It's all about the archives here.

DC: Mandatory was formed a whole decade later than the bands that have inspired your band. Have you ever been made to feel that you are not truly old school? Do you acknowledge the recent trend of newer bands playing old school death metal music? If so, what do you make of it?

Sascha: That's a funny question somehow. We started out in 2001. Around that time there was no MySpace and there was no Old School-Retro trend. We really felt being some kind of special back then. In fact, we were. I remember some mates from my studies going crazy about a new Old School band. But of course we played that style because we just liked it. Today, there are way too many of these retro bands out there. I see hundreds and thousands of them on MySpace. That's a shame. I remember our first reviews where the reviewers named bands like Grave or Asphyx and we thought "Yeah, cool. He's right!". But today every second demo is advertised with "The new killer mega ultra Mini-CD by XY in the style of Grave, Unleashed, Dismember blablabla". And these bands pose with spikes and bullet belts, send out hundreds of bulletins everyday advertising their ONE new song. I mean, they have ONE single new song and they feel like being the next big thing and pave other users' profiles with tons of HTML shit. So, old school is nothing special for me at the moment. It's a new kind of trend. Funny, isn't it?

I was never happy with being labeled "OLD SCHOOL DEATH METAL". In fact, we mix in a lot of that stuff but on the new album you will hear that MANDATORY is more than just "Old School". I want to set ourselves apart from this retro-old school-scene.

DC: How supportive is the local scene in Germany? I don't suppose you perform live very often. Why is that? I believe your music is quite headbangable, and also the blood-curdling vocals in your music could prove to be quite exhilarating in a live setting.

Sascha: Yeah so far we have been busy writing, recording and releasing music. Most bands write 3 songs and go on stage. But no one in their audience is into their 3 songs. That's no cool experience in our eyes. Neither for the band, nor for the audience. So we will go on stage and play for people who have come to see us. And the next show will come. Definitely. As for the German scene, I am not into this scene. But also not into any other country's scene. There are a lot of killer bands here in Germany and worldwide. Just take your 5 minutes on MySpace and you will find a lot of them. I am sure.

DC: What do you think of today's flashy technical death metal bands and the brutal slam bands? Are there any new bands that you really enjoy (not necessarily of those genres)?

Sascha: Hmm.. All in all I do not like that style and all these hypertechnical bands. Most of them are produced way too clean and their albums lack spirit. Last week I listened to some old school masterpieces like DISGRACE – "Grey Misery", LOBOTOMY's first 2 demos, THERION's "Of Darkness" and EXCRUCIATE's "Passage Of Life". These albums and demos are produced really, really well. Ok, I know, today most people would rate these productions outdated but I personally prefer these productions. I think a killer Death Metal record should have a dirty sound. Of course, it should be fat, in-your-face and brutal but also dirty. You know, Black Metal is only dirty and not fat haha. And lots of albums released in today's Death Metal scene are way too clean.

DC: Out of curiosity, what kind of jobs/activities the Mandatory members are involved in?

Sascha: I study musicology. About to do my examination this winter. Also writing a lot of different music for other styles and labels. Stinne has finished his studies some weeks ago. Steffen is also busy with his studies and Adrian works as an event-technician/engineer.

DC: No wonder. You guys were born to create music. Thank you very much for taking the time out to answer these questions! Your last words go here. I hope Mandatory receive the backing of a good label and that "Adrift Beyond" proves to be an outstanding and a very important release in 2009! All the best for getting signed to a label of your choice [Label owners, I hope you are reading this!] Cheers!

Sascha: Thanks as hell! We really appreciate your support bro!

Maniacs, watch out for "Adrift Beyond" – you will love the album! We have done our best!