

# Wisdom from the Crypts

## - Skogsberg vs. Swanö -

Hello dear gourmets of the one and only Metal of Death! I hope you enjoyed reading this zine so far. Now, we are gonna dive deep into history - the history of Swedish Death Metal production! But we will also have a look on the Metal productions of other countries and philosophies that result in what we call a 'unique sound'. And what would make more sense than to share my thoughts and questions with two of the most important persons ever to be involved in the evolution of Swedish Death Metal and its sound?! So now sitting with me at this virtual table are the man who had the biggest influence on classic milestone recordings released by great bands like Entombed, Dismember, Grave or Sorcery - Tomas Skogsberg, owner of Sunlight Studio - and the not less legendary Dan „The Man“ Swanö, workaholic, musical mastermind of Edge Of Sanity, Infestdead or Bloodbath and owner of Unisound Studio! Both being renowned for their unreached talents as producers. So, please, give it up for these two living legends! [Applause]

**Sascha:** Hell-o Tomas, hell-o Dan! How are you doin' folks? How's the weather in Sweden? Here in Germany it's fine!

**Tomas:** Hi! Sun, rain, sun, rain...

**Dan:** I am sure the weather in Sweden is just fine. But I am in a hotelroom in Oudebosche (Holland) right now, so I really don't know. It was pretty awesome here today, though I spent most of the day indoors working with Arjen Lucassen, doing my vocals for the new Star One. Even some growling!

**Sascha:** As you can imagine it's a great pleasure for me, being a musician myself, to interview you two guys - especially in one and the same interview. I grew up listening to the landmark recordings you did back in the day with bands like Entombed, Edge Of Sanity, Dismember or Grave. And I guess there are thousands of young musicians and Death Metal listeners out there who could ask you just as many questions. So I will try to come up with a bunch of totally varying topics here. I guess the very first question coming to mind when talking about the early Swedish Death Metal scene is: Did you realize back then that you were about to experience the birth of a whole scene? Were there any signs of what was about to come? How did you experience this time?

**Tomas:** I thought it was the beginning of something.

**Dan:** My first entry in the book of metal was with Brejn Dedd and we were pretty much old news musically. We sounded like a mix of S.O.D, Wehrmacht and Anthrax. It wasn't until I got more involved in the underground and heard stuff like DEATH "Leprosy" and a bit later the 1st ENTOMBED demo, that I felt "Fuck,..I haven't heard this kind of stuff before? and I was later on a part of EDGE OF SANITY and we started out as a Techno-Thrash band, but after a few rehearsals I presented songs like "Immoral Souls" and "Maze Of Existence" and stuff would get more Death Metal oriented. We got our first record deal in mid 1990, Not band for a band formed as a one/off thing in November 1989. I really understood how cool

that whole thing was when started to go to the gigs in Fagersta and the Thrash Bash gigs in Norrköping. People from all over Sweden (and beyond) travelled for hours upon hours to see Merciless, Grave, Entombed, Sepultura...you name it. And I honestly spent a lot more outside trading demos than I did looking at the bands. And by the time I got like 20 letters a day and recorded death metal demos every weekend in my small 4 track studio...well...I knew something unique had happened to me!

**Sascha:** How did the bands - and the members all being teenagers - get information about each other? I mean: The early 90's, this was a time without internet. And Death Metal was not a subject for the daily newspapers I guess. So how could this scene start out at different places? And can you explain how all these bands were able to develop a quite similar playing style?

**Tomas:** Through fanzines and the underground.

**Dan:** The tapetrading was an incredibly powerful thing. Before that took place we all listened to the records you could find at your local recordstore and kind of blended them together with our own twisted minds. I could dream up songs mixed with the musical DNA or like Voivod meets Pestilence meets Candlemass meets Death. And have something pretty unique. Then another guy in another city makes his own mix of these bands but adds a twist of GBH or DISCHARGE to it...and it all sounds similar, yet different. It's the X ingredient.

**Sascha:** And since you are famous for your recordings it seems logical to ask at which time in your life did you decide to build up your own studio? What was the reason for it and how did you get your first equipment? At which age did you start your studios? And could you make a living with it?

**Tomas:** Yes! I started the studio in a pro-way around 86-87 at the age of 26.

**Dan:** I have been obsessed with recording stuff for as long as I can remember. My first professional studio was setup seriously in 1993. But before that I had done lots of demos and even albums on 4 and 8 track machines. I was 20 when Unisound was officially opened. In the beginning I actually borrowed the stuff. My brother had just bought an 8 track Fostex + Desk and we split the money 50/50. After a while I could invest in a Fostex E-16 and a Soundcraft desk. I made a decent living with Unisound. But then I probably worked like 350 days a year...

**Sascha:** Which was the very first band you recorded back in the day and which memories do you combine with the recording and the band?

**Tomas:** I don't remember but i think there was some punk! And big FUN!

**Dan:** I cannot really remember. But I think F.Z.Ö. was one of the first outside bands I ever recorded seriously. The first fulllength I ever did was Harvey Wallbanger.

For F.Z.Ö. I remember being excited about working with those guys. They were the coolest kids in town! Harvey Wallbanger was also amazing guys. We recorded during 2 concecutive weekends and they all stayed at my parents house. The LP sounded pretty good after the pressing plant had compressed and EQ's the master before cutting the vinyl.

**Sascha:** Do you still have good contact to the bands you once recorded? Any special friends among them?

**Tomas:** Yes, some of them.

**Dan:** Some of them I bump into from time to time. I see the Millencolin guys around quite often and I still do a lot of work for Kentha Philipson (TPH, Torture Division) and also some of the guys that recorded demos with me really early on e.g. Necrony, Suckerfish, Autocrash, Wedge etc. I meet them quite often because of my extra job as a studio/PC/Mac specialist at a musicstore.

**Sascha:** From all the bands of the original early 90's Swedish scene - which is the most underrated for you? The one that had deserved more success in your opinion?

**Tomas:** Grave!

**Dan:** Edge Of Sanity...well..I know it's "wrong", but I really do believe we deserve a better fate. But we did all the mistakes we could and god knows what would have happened if only we'd followed up on that positive letter back from Earache back in 1990... I did work with a few demo bands that had something extra that I always believed should go further. Autocrash for example was excellent stuff, but they never really did anything serious after the stuff we recorded together. Proboscis deserved better than they got, too. Great guys and great playing.

**Sascha:** What do you think about all those reunions of veteran Death Metal bands, especially those that never released an album so far in their 15 to 20+ years career? Are there any reunions that make big sense for you or any which you dislike for whatever reason?

**Tomas:** I don't know.

**Dan:** Not really. I think it's great that they pick up the torch again and set fire to the scene again. I love working with the "elders" like Asphyx and Hail Of Bullets. Most of them are family fathers and this is their one true style of music that they "fall back" to. Most elders fall back to country or blues or some other stuff. These guys go banging their skulls to pieces armed to their teeth with pointy axes and HM-2 pedals in their forties! Respect!

**Sascha:** Haha! Back to studio work: Do you have any philosophy when it comes to recording? Anything that is a must for you or a total no-go? Perhaps even psychological aspects?

**Tomas:** It's all the time a new adventure, a new trip!

**Dan:** I think the actual location is crucial. That the air is good, daylight, good monitoring for all musicians and no alcohol or smoking (I am sure Tomas disagrees!!!)

The dream place to work was Studio Kuling/ 1st location of Fascination Street (R.I.P.). 15 hours there was a breeze!!

**Sascha:** Do you have any go-to-gear which you almost regularly use in the studio? Special mic's, preamps, converters, FX, comps or EQ's?? And which of them did you already use on the classic albums of the early 90's?

**Tomas:** Seck 48-24-2 - the desk.

**Dan:** Not really. I am not an outboard guy. I love my UAD-2 plug-ins to death. I'd be lost without them. The only thing I use on a regular basis that was a part of the early Unisound stuff is an Audio Technica 4033 microphones. I have A/B'd it to lots of microphones but it hold up well to even stuff twice it's price...so that is probably the only thing.

**Sascha:** Yeah, the UAD is a must-own! You are right! I also love it! How about analogue tape? Do you still use it today? If yes, at which stage in the production?

**Tomas:** I use it in the beginning and then I put everything into the computer.

**Dan:** I had to transfer some stuff back from tape and I just couldn't believe all the noise and shit. Some sounds sounded cool though. Black Metal guitars sounded harsh and evil but still easy on the ear. That is hard to get on digital. Cymbals also felt less "different" in balance (not sure that is good thing though) I tried recording to 2 inch with Nightingale but gave up after a few minutes. It just sounded to noise for me. I guess I am more of a digital guy, but the idea of "re-amping" certain stuff to a piece of tape and back into digital is something I would like to try. But then it needs to be all top-notch, and I am not sure if I can afford it. ;)

**Sascha:** Out of all your productions are there any which you are exceptionally proud of? And why?

**Tomas:** "Wolverine Blues", because it's a good mix between Metal and Rock 'n' Roll.

**Dan:** Not really. I know an engineer should be. But there are minor flaws with all my work. I have been like 90% satisfied on a few occasions, but there are always things to improve upon. But as long as the band is 100% happy, it's enough for me. None mentioned, none forgotten.

**Sascha:** Has there ever been a moment in your lives when you had doubt about your situation or when you thought about doing something completely different apart from music and recording?

**Tomas:** NO!

**Dan:** Oh yeah. I stopped doing it fulltime 13 years ago, and that was the best decision ever. I grew up a lot in those first years "off" the studio clock and learned how to interact more with society during my fulltime work in the musicshop. I even sold Tomas a Joemeek SC compressor once!! [Can I buy it back!?!?] It gave me time to find out what kind of rig to go for after giving up on my Fostex E16. I tried all digital things that wasn't a computer, but it wasn't until I spent a small fortune on a Blue/White MAC G3 that I feel in love with digital. Moving around audio like it was MIDI was science fiction come true!

**Sascha:** Please, give us some insight into your musical tastes starting with your Top 5 „Alltime favourite Death Metal albums“:

**Tomas:** I pass.

**Dan:** DEATH - "Leprosy", ENTOMBED - "Left Hand Path", PESTILENCE - "Malleus Maleficarum", DEICIDE - "Deicide" and OBITUARY - "Slowly We Rot" are the ones that spring to mind right now. Might be others on 3, 4 and 5 tomorrow.

**Sascha:** And how about your 5 favourite NON-Metal albums? I am sure you do not listen to Metal or Rock exclusively.

**Tomas:** I pass.

**Dan:** MARILLION - "Seasons End", FM - "Indiscreet", KANSAS - "Leftoverture", RUSH - "Hold Your Fire", MERCYFUL FATE - "Don't Break The Oath".

**Sascha:** Ha! Mercyful Fate IS Metal! Swindler! Haha! Ok, a bit off-topic perhaps but I would like to ask it nevertheless: Would you go along with me when I say that what is really missing about today's Metal productions - even though they are well-done and massive - is the

individual character of each studio or even country? I mean in the 90's whenever I bought a bunch of Metal CD's I knew that I could expect different sounds from different countries. Swedish bands sounded Swedish but also East European bands like early-to-mid-era Krabathor or Vader sounded like they did back then and mediterranean bands like Septic Flesh or Rotting Christ also had their own sound. I also remember Salem or Misanthrope developing a unique mixture in their music in the 90's. The fact that each region had it's own dedicated studio equipment resulted in more varied sound in the Death Metal scene. Would you go along with me or do you have a different opinion on this?

**Tomas:** Most of the music today sounds too MTV (=bad)!

**Dan:** I wouldn't have been typing this interview if it wasn't for the special vibe from each engineer in the 80/90's. The time before the "reference-record-slavery" I put together a few hours of death & thrash for a DJ job i did some years ago, and I imported all the tracks and it was interesting to see how many different versions of a "good sound" that existed back then. I mean, the early Obituary stuff and the first Deicide sounds really "odd", but I believed them to be "the shit" when it came out. I love albums that have a special sound like Mercyful Fate "Don't Break The Oath" and "Melissa". Also "Sad Wings Of Destiny" from Judas Priest has a special sound. You hear in 1 second that it is that album. A bit harder to do with a metalcore production from today!!

**Sascha:** Yes! That's what I tried to say. Exactly! Associating the following with the last question, do you have any special Death Metal favourites from other European countries when thinking back to the 90's? Any special album? I am especially interested in those bands and productions that are not the typical faves.

**Tomas:** I pass.

**Dan:** Hobbs Angel of Death's self-titled album is superb. 1st Pestilence sounds weird but fantastic. I also think the early Samael and Celtic Frost stuff have a very unique sound that almost is one with the music. It would be strange to hear "Into The Pentagram" with the sound of the latest Creed album...

**Sascha:** Is there any musician in the world that you adore exceptionally and why?

**Tomas:** Ozzy Osborne! Why? He is the prince of darkness! Hi hi hi!

**Dan:** I think Kerry Livgren (KANSAS) is a superb songwriter. Simon Phillips is an extraordinary drummer (JUDAS PRIEST - "Sin After Sin"). Geddy Lee (RUSH) is quite the bass-ace. Dann Huff (GIANT) is an amazing guitarplayer. Lou Gramm sang like a god on the early Foreigner stuff. I must mention Eddie Jobson (ROXY MUSIC / JETHRO TULL) on keyboards. He is fucking insane!! And their album must be mixed by Chris Lord Alge!!!

**Sascha:** Haha, and now it's brainstorming-time! I will give you some keywords or sentences - totally different ones but all revolving around your music, productions or Death Metal in general - and you give your comment, ok? Here we go!

*„Death Metal is for me...“*

**Tomas:** Tight!

**Dan:** An unexpected twist in my musicality that have been the key to the life I live now. I am proud of whatever I had to do with it to end up where it is today.

„Leo Fender“

**Tomas:** Strat!

**Dan:** Not really a Fender man myself. But some of his amps sound bad ass for clean/crunch. The MusicMan bass sounds cool!

„Crematory“

**Tomas:** Nice guys!

**Dan:** One of the guys drew fantasatic logos. Never hear them.

„Robert Moog“

**Tomas:** Hero!

**Dan:** I stroked a MiniMoog yesterday and I heard what you can do with it when you double it six times. Fuck! Fattest thing ever built!!

„Montezuma Studio and ,The Boss’“

**Tomas:** Don't remember!

**Dan:** I think the 1st album could have been better sounding, Unorthodox is better. The Boss wasn't really the kind of man we needed at the time. But I am not sure we had been better off as a low priority band on any of the bigger german labels either. Som man bäddar får man ligga!

„Parallel compression“

**Tomas:** Ok!

**Dan:** Never got it quite right. Not a fan of “obvious“ compression. I love the UAD Precision Multiband. This one can keep the dynamics in check, even the stuff that a normal compressor will “miss“.

„Edge Of Sanity“

**Tomas:** Good!

**Dan:** very important part of my carreer. I got to do some really cool shit because of this band. Could have ended nicer though.

„Antichristian lyrics“

**Tomas:** Good!!!

**Dan:** An easy topic. So many ways to pick on christianity.

„Animals“

**Tomas:** Yes/No!

**Dan:** Cats, dogs? Pink Floyd? Or do you mean Tomas' project Animal War? Yep. I know way too much. ;)

**Sascha:** Haha! Secrets of the past! But yeah bro, I mean the FLOYD-album.

**Dan:** I have no real relationship to that album. I know my brother used to play parts of it to freak out a dog we used to "babysit" every once in a while. That's it about it.

*„Promix“*

**Tomas:** I don't know!

**Dan:** Started out as a disaster. Fucked up my work with the Dark Funeral full length, that poor Tomas tried to compete. I cannot say it is the best console ever built, but once I got to know it a little bit more, I couldn't live without it. I later upgraded to a 03D

*„When not recording and producing music I like to...“*

**Tomas:** Style my Hot-Rod.

**Dan:** Hang out with my girlfriend, do stuff with my son, Watch TV. Eat icecream.

*„An absolute no-go in Death Metal AND each other music is...“*

**Tomas:** I pass.

**Dan:** I know I should go there...but I have learned to absolutely hate saxophones. even though it have pestered both PTM and Unicorn stuff.....(Soprano sax can still sound right But a big, beefy tenor-sax just pushes buttons in me these days!!)

*„An instrument or piece of gear I long for...“*

**Tomas:** I pass.

**Dan:** I would like go have a guitarplaying robot :) It would be cool to have a True Temperament neck. I would also like to add a Nord Electro 3 to my collection. Just bought the Stage EX 88 and it brought back the lust to buy keyboards instead of using VST stuff.

*„The most important thing in my life is...“*

**Tomas:** My kids and my desk.

**Dan:** Family and music.

**Sascha:** That was really interesting! So, now after all these years of working hard in the Metal scene is there anything which you would love to do? Anything you have not experienced yet? Any band you would like to do a production with?

**Tomas:** The Beatles in 1968.

**Dan:** I am happy with the way things work out at the moment. I know getting the Second Sky album ready and promote it will be a new thing for me. It will be the first album where I will take all criticism personally. That one is straight from the heart, on top of my knowledge. For all other releases there has always been an excuse...but for this one I feel that I have given 100% and I am sure there will be a lot of people who will hate the album because of it commercial nature. Be gentle with me

**Sascha:** Looking back now, what do you guys think about your own and each others following productions - musically and production-wise? It would be great if you could comment on each of them. Anything you particularly like about them? Anything you would change if you had the chance?

*Carnage - Dark Recollections*

*Edge Of Sanity - The Spectral Sorrows*

*Grave - Into The Grave*

*Exhumation - Eternal Seas Of Silence*  
*Desultory - Bitterness*  
*Dan Swanö - Moontower*  
*Lobotomy - Born In Hell*  
*Infestdead - Hellfuck*

**Tomas:** I pass.

**Dan:** Carnage - "Dark Recollections": Sounds cool to me. Almost as good as "Left Hand Path". "Death Evocation" is classic stuff

Edge Of Sanity - "The Spectral Sorrows": Sounds fucked up in every way, yet it broke the band into a bigger market. Chris from Therion once told me: "How come you have the worst and the best sounding snare on the same album???"

Grave - "Into The Grave": Good stuff. Sounded a bit darker than normal.

Exhumation - "Eternal Seas Of Silence": Cannot remember the sound itself. I do remember that I sang on it. That part is cool.

Desultory - "Bitterness": Just remastered that one, and it sounds a little bit too much garage/rehearsal room for my taste. But most Sunlight stuff from that era sounded less "modern".

Dan Swanö - "Moontower": I am proud of this one still. Not much I would like to change.

Lobotomy - "Born In Hell": I remember it being a bit heavy on the highmids. It really stood out on some compilation CD I used to listen to in the studio.

Infestdead - "Hellfuck": Not too bad. The remastered version sounds really good. Much better than the one before and after.

**Sascha:** And now some completely different Death Metal recordings which none of you was involved in but that I think are interesting and individual in their own character and which showcase the variety of the early-to-mid 90's Death Metal scene. Comments?

*Mortification - Scrolls Of The Megilloth (1992)*  
*Septic Flesh - Esoptron (1995)*  
*Tiamat - The Astral Sleep (1991)*  
*Orphaned Land - El Norra Alila (1996)*  
*Asphyx - Last One On Earth (1992)*  
*Salem - Kaddish (1994)*

**Tomas:** I pass.

**Dan:** Sorry, but I have only heard that Tiamat album. And I remember the guitar sound sounding like it was miked up in a basket. The rest I have no comment about. Sorry.

**Sascha:** As for Asphyx - "Last one On Earth": Never ever heard it before? Really? Their second album from 1992.

**Dan:** Nope. Don't know why. But I never got around to listen to any Asphyx apart from the albums I mixed (latest studio and upcoming live).

**Sascha:** Slowly coming to the end of this interview, which were the last productions you did at your studios? Bands, albums?

**Tomas:** In metal (The Generals death and roll) Highride actionrock.

**Dan:** I have just finished LETTERS FROM YOU, UNCREATION, THESE ARE THEY, M.E.S.S. ENTRAILS (The sound is cloned from Clandestine. Check it out and be spooked!!!) DEMIURG, BLOWBACK.



**Sascha:** Is there anything you could advise young Metal musicians out there to do or NOT to do?

**Tomas:** Trust your ears.

**Dan:** Write songs in computer programs and stuff. I will try to kick the clicktrack for my next project, Witherscape. very few classic albums have been recorded to a clicktrack, yet riffs are even written to an even meter these days.

**Sascha:** Finally, some words of wisdom or whatever you would like to tell the Death Metal scene out there. It's your free space of words.

**Tomas:** Give peace chance!

**Dan:** Keep it up! May it live forever!

**Sascha:** Folks, thanks soooo much for these great insights and the both of you taking part in this interview!! Byebye!!

**Tomas:** Bye!

**Dan:** Thanx for your time too!!

Rock on, keep on worshipping Death Metal and support the fuckin' underground!

Sascha Beselt / MANDATORY

New Album „*Adrift Beyond*“ (*mixed by Tomas Skogsberg*) out on Xtream Music 2010!!

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