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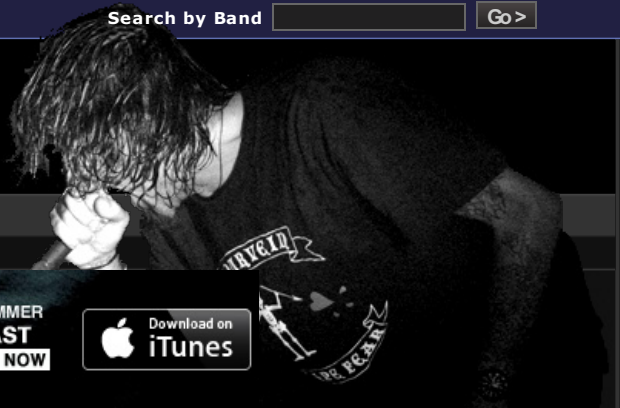
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Interview

Imminent Sonic Destruction Discusses Their New Album "Recurring Themes"

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Imminent Sonic Destruction is progressive metal far beyond the standard wistful keyboard solos and five-minute guitar solos. There are multiple songs with double-digit lengths, but there are also accessible numbers with potential mainstream appeal. Coming from the streets of Detroit, Michigan, this group came together after vocalist/guitarist Tony Piccoli had an album's worth of songs that needed to be recorded by a group of musicians. However, this isn't a solo project or just something brought together out of convenience alone; Imminent Sonic Destruction appears to be a tight unit capable of writing their own songs.

I had a chance to speak to Piccoli, keyboardist Pete Hopersberger, and drummer Pat DeLeon about the band's debut album "Recurring Themes," penning material from scratch together, and the advantages and disadvantages to self-releasing an album.

Can you briefly run me down the origins of the band? How did you guys come together?

Tony Piccoli: We were put together in a way by our current manager, John "Koggie" Kotzian. Basically, I had written a bunch of songs on my own a long time ago. Koggie really liked them and he was like, 'This has to happen.' I had nobody to play with; I had just written the songs. What he did was he knew all of us individually and he said, 'Hey guys, what do you think about playing these songs?' We were all in and after one rehearsal, we pretty much decided that this was going to be a permanent thing.

Since you guys came together by your manager, did it take a while to find that chemistry or did you know it from that first rehearsal?

Pete Hopersberger: I would say it was right at the first rehearsal. It was pretty obvious. It makes it sound a little more like it was some kind of a business decision by Koggie, but it really wasn't. He was a friend of ours individually. He's just another musician in the local area and we all knew each other in general. He was the common thread. A couple of us knew each other pretty well here and there, but he wanted these songs to get out there and he was like, 'These are the guys that I know can play these songs,' so he put us together. We hit it off immediately. The chemistry was just...I was pretty astounded by it actually. We've all played in other bands, but it was quite different. The first time we got together to play songs, I remember looking back and forth at the other guys going, 'Holy crap' (laughs). We get along so great. We would probably be hanging out even if we weren't forcefully made to hang out (laughs). We're just good friends anyway. It's cool.

Tony, how much of this material was actually done before that first rehearsal?

Tony Piccoli: Most of the songs, I'd say 75-80% of the songs, were already written completely. We made some minor changes to most of them, and we did write one song as a band, "Breaking Through." Most of the songs were written.

What kind of influences or inspirations did you bring into these songs when you first started writing them?

Tony Piccoli: When I started writing most of the stuff, it was heavily influenced by Dream Theater. I was starting to get into bands like Meshuggah, and Devin Townsend's solo albums a lot. I almost don't want to admit it, but I was really into The Flower Kings at the time. Also, early Genesis was a big influence. I just like really long passages of music that for some people would take a lot of time to digest. I grew up listening to Metallica and Nirvana and stuff like that too, so I could say that's part of the influence.

Can you run me down what it was like to have all the members together to work on the song "Breaking



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Through"? Did you find it easier Tony to have people help you out with the songs?

Tony Piccoli: To be perfectly honest, Pete came to the table with most of the riffs for that song. We all took turns shaping certain sections of the song. To answer the question, 'Was it helpful to have these guys?', that's a better question for Pete, considering the song. My personal experience, I'd say it took a while to write the song, but it was pretty fulfilling. Just as easy as writing a song on my own, I guess I could say.

Pete Hopersberger: For me, just from past bands, if I wrote a song, I would write the whole thing and bring it to the band. In this case, it was longer and more involved. Like he said, I would bring riffs in and we would spend a lot of time jamming in a room with a white board and write down parts. Anybody that would come up with an idea or a riff, anything that was inspired by what we were already doing, we would just roll with it. The whole song took a lot of twists and turns in that way. It was fun. I don't know if you would say easier, but we're not really looking for easy. We were looking for, 'This is still great. This is fulfilling and inspiring.' That's what it felt like to me. I don't know how much Tony agonizes writing the songs on his own when he does it, so I guess it's more different than easier or harder.

Did you find once "Breaking Through" was done and finished that it fit in well with the rest of the songs Tony had brought to the table?

Pete Hopersberger: I was worried that it wasn't, but they all kept telling me that they liked it.

Pat DeLeon: There is a sound in this song that really sets it apart from Tony's style of writing. You can really pick it up. It's pretty obvious when you hear the song because there's so many really various sounds that aren't on the other songs. There's vocal structuring that's not in the other songs. I think the average listener listening to the whole record is going to listen to this song and go, 'Okay, I can totally see this. This was not one guy's thought process. There's a lot of other factors that are going on here.' We really love that song because of what it is. It's our first real solid group effort and that's why we're really excited, after this is done, to get back in and start writing. Tony has a lot of great ideas that are pretty much thought out, but we as a band are much more excited about doing more of that group style of writing.

Pete Hopersberger: Just thinking about what Pat said, I wouldn't say that this song doesn't fit with the album. There's a whole lot of diversity throughout all the album. It's not like all of Tony's songs sound the same. There's some shorter, mellow songs; there's long, crazier songs; there's really heavy stuff. It's another aspect of the album, but it's not like, 'Oh, the album sounds like one guy wrote it, except for this song.' I wouldn't want to categorize it like that, though I don't think Pat's trying to do that. I didn't want it to come across that way at all because there's so much variety in it. It seems like another texture to the album and it still sounds like us.

I noticed when I was listening to the album the variety that was present. Each song brings something new to the table. How was the band able to find a balance between having all that variety and keeping it grounded, so it doesn't go in all these different directions without fitting into one piece?

Pat DeLeon: I think the simple fact of that is the kind of players that we have in the band and the five different attitudes and the five different musical tastes that we all bring to the table. When we learn a song that Tony has already written, we don't learn it note for note and verbatim, for the most part. We keep a huge part of the original thought and we spice it up with whatever we bring to the table. If you're hear those things that set the songs apart from each other, a lot of that has to do with the fact that Tony can write not only one type of song. He can write a whole bunch of different types of songs and sounds. We as a band, when we air our two cents and bring our own styles to that song, it makes it even more unique. That's the cool thing about how we approach learning Tony's song or when we're writing as a group.

Were there any types of themes or concepts that could relate to both the music and the lyrics?

Tony Piccoli: There wasn't something done intentionally. If you listen to the album, you can definitely hear it's one piece, which was intentional. It's not like a concept album the way that we all know a concept album to be. There really isn't much of a connection between the songs lyrically. When you put together an album, you want to make sure that the whole thing flows as one piece, which is where some people will get the idea that maybe it is conceptual.

Pete Hopersberger: The cool thing is that, with the guy who did the artwork, Tony sent him the music and told him, 'Listen to the music. See what you think of it and what comes to your head. Take the artwork from that.' He came back with his description of what he thought the album was about. It was real clear what it was about to him and he gave us a description of what the album was about. We kind of laughed, but it was like, 'Okay, that's cool.' The cool thing about it is a lot of people are going to interpret it in different ways. You leave things a little bit vague on purpose. Some people can get more out of it if they can relate to it on some level you didn't intend. It means more to them than if you're being really obvious and direct with your lyrics and they go, 'Oh, I don't care about this.' I don't know if it was intentional, or it's just knid of the way it comes out when we do it.

If you could pick one song to represent this album, in your own opinion, which one would it be?

Tony Piccoli: We would all say different songs. My first thought would be "With Death This Story Ends." It contains some great vocal harmonies, it's got some really screwed-up musical interludes, a sweet keyboard solo, and one of my best guitar solos ever.

What kind of touring plans is the band looking to go on in support of "Recurring Themes"?

Tony Piccoli: We're looking to get representation from a booking company. Right now, there are no plans. We're still looking at a couple of different labels trying to get represented by them, and then take it from there. We are working on a specific booking company to see if we can get some shows together.

I would assume then that you guys self-released this record.

Pete Hopersberger: We've done everything ourselves so far. It seems lately, we got a lot of potential for things to break loose for us. Yeah, so far, we've done it all ourselves.

Have you guys found it difficult to run everything by yourselves?

Pat DeLeon: I would say, other than finances...the artistic freedoms you have when you have complete creative control over your product are awesome. If you've got financial backing, that makes it even better, but we're like a lot of other bands out there. We all work to support the band. All the money that this band makes turns around right into the band. It's nice that we can do and say whatever we want as far as the future and how this band runs, but by the same token, I think we would love to have one of the bigger and better labels that can market us a lot better than we as five individuals can. Nowadays, like I said, you have way more creative and artistic control over your product. You do all of that yourself, and let them stamp a label on it and get it into the hands of people that normally you wouldn't be able to do that with.

Pete Hopersberger: Luckily, we have our friend who has become our manager. He's got a lot more business sense than all the rest of us. Koggie has done a lot for either coming up with good ideas for helping us market or dealing with people he knows or he has met over the years. He has a lot of connections, and that's how we hooked up with Roy Z. He got the demos to Roy Z and said, 'Let me get your opinions on these and see what you think.' He liked them enough that he was interested in producing us. We got him to come out to Detroit and spend some time with us. We made a lot of things happen on our own. Koggie has been a big part of helping open some doors for us. Things have worked well that way so far, but we're looking to get to the next step.

Were you surprised the band was able to get somebody like Roy Z involved in the album?

Tony Piccoli: I don't know if you would say surprised, but it was cool. We had an idea that it was going to happen and Koggie was pretty confident that Roy, once he heard the music, was going to be into it. It was a matter of finding the time. What surprised me was that Roy found the time. He came out here and he was awesome. I think he got the best performance out of all of us.

Pete Hopersberger: I think we were all worried that he was going to try to big-time us. Tony and I both love the stuff he did with Bruce Dickinson's solo work that we were really impressed with him overall to being with. We were worried that he wasn't going to come over here or we weren't going to be able to pay him enough or he's going to big-time us. He was just the coolest guy and so down-to-earth. He never gave us a hassle about anything and we were always comfortable with him. He's turned into a really great friend. We've hung out with him a few other times since then and we plan on working with him again.

If you could tour with one band, past or present, who would it be and why?

Pat DeLeon: When I was 12 or 13, my uncle Michael had the Rush "Fly By Night" album. The next album I heard after that was Rush's "All The World's A Stage." From that point on, I wanted to play drums. I've been in the record retail business for a lot of years and met a lot of people, but the elusive Neil Peart...I always wanted to meet him and hang with him. That's my dream tour. Just to do a couple of concerts with him would be awesome. For me, that would be the one.

Tony Piccoli: I think, given the type of music we play and who they are, as far as an influence to this entire band, I would love to tour with Dream Theater. They seem like cool guys, from everything I've heard. Of course, their audience would love us. Quite honestly, I think it would be Metallica opening for Ozzy Osbourne all over again (laughs).

Pete Hopersberger: I would have to say Tenacious D. I just think they are awesome. I don't know if that would work, but this is kind of a fictional answer anyway (laughs). Dave Grohl drumming for them would be pretty cool too. I love their vocal harmonies and the attitudes they bring behind the music. More honestly, I think that Opeth would be a great one. I would love to tour with them. That would be awesome. I think we would hit it off with them, and our music would go well with theirs.

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