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INTERVIEW WITH IMMINENT SONIC DESTRUCTION'S TONY PICCOLI & BRYAN PAXTON

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IMMINENT SONIC DESTRUCTION:

IMPACT IS IMMINENT

BY TOMMY HASH

The DIY Ethic has always held strong in the

world of rock and roll, from the psychedelic/garage rock era of the independent 45 rpm releases in the late 60's, through the tape trading era that Metallica started, through the Internet era of now – self promotion has proven to be an important role in whether a band makes it. Nowadays where social networking, media, and various other technology has created a whole barrage and saturation of bands seeking success and fame in one form or another, it's a no-brainer that band's have to have the full package, good songs, good musicianship, a very well produced recording, stability within the band, road miles with touring gig behind them, the ability to take themselves beyond the beyond and swerve any obstacles along the way.

A band out of the Detroit area that has stood as independent is Imminent Sonic Destruction, formally known as melotron_ and formed by Tony Piccoli years ago, the quintet unleashed the E.P. And Go... as melotron_. It sparked interest and was well received, but something was missing – what that was a full album as opposed to a handful of songs. The band's sound reflects a blend of various influences ranging from Dream Theater, Grunge-era rock, Tool, to modern bands such as Haken & Devin Townsend, clichés and tendencies to create this concerto or opus are put aside for this band to simply rock out, but on a more technical scale, putting the melodies and songs in focus to be more than just your average thinking man's metal band.

Fast forward years later and the band has finally released Recurring Themes independently without record deal, but with the sound and look of something that was – anyway you look at it, to stand out, you have to have something that is professional, even with the band calling the shots. One of the shots they called was to bite the bullet and enlist Roy Z (Bruce Dickinson, Rob Halford) as their producer and the end result of Recurring Themes would prove to be something much, much more than some bedroom/basement demo passed off as a finished album – it may have taken them time to get it finished, but

time has been on their side.

Guitarist/Vocalist/Songwriter Tony Piccoli and bassist Bryan Paxton speak about what beholds upon this "Progressive Super Metal" Band' known as ISD, as their debut has just hit the shelves.

"For anyone that might know the history as we used to be known as mellotron_, I wrote these songs forever ago on my own and our manager John "Koggie" Kotzian eventually pieced together our band about seven years ago." begins Piccoli on finally getting the album recorded, "We had one EP before, all the songs on that EP except for one made it to this album. There is one song that we wrote as a full band, which is "Breaking Through." Basically we spent a lot of time performing and then when the opportunity hit we got hooked up with Roy Z through our manager, Koggie, and about a year and a half ago; we then recorded the basic drum tracks, some guitars, and my vocal tracks – and it took about a year and a half before Roy left – for us to finish the album. And by 'finished' it, I mean we had Nick mix it and that took about 5-6 months because of money and time. Then it was mastered by Martin Clem, which took a month and a half; that was very quick considering how long it took – and here we are."

The songs hold a unique edge, as many build up to a crescendo mixing an intense vibe with more mellow passages, executing more than your simplistic pop songwriting formula, yet keeping a retention of melody. One track in particular that beholds to the more epic mantra is the extended "Raven," "The inspiration behind 'Raven' – that one actually started over ten years ago when I was in high school, when I was in one of my old, old high school bands," continues Piccoli, "I kind of brought it with me when I moved out of Arizona, that song is really an exercise in putting music to lyrics – the 'Raven' being inspired somewhat by Edgar Allan Poe, I just wanted to make something that was epic, where all parts go together and convey some type of visual. That's one of the big things that I want to do when I write a song – I want to convey some type of vision. As far as the music always changing, going back and forth,

Bryan can probably tell you a little more about this. For the song 'Breaking Through', it kind of goes all over the place; keyboardist Pete Hoppersberger threw in the riffs here and there – I think as band we are all into dynamics, from one end to the other, bringing the song down, bringing it up, slowing it down, speeding it up, it's really satisfying to play as musicians, one of my favorite parts on the album is that clean guitar on 'Breaking Through', kind of in the middle of it."



Tony Piccoli

Bryan Paxton also tells it was a meeting of the minds when it came to the creation of this record as he joins in to explain, "There was a lot of musicianship that we wanted to prove together as a band. Pete gave us the skills to hold the structure of the song – so it was like, here are the riffs I want to use, here is the course of the lyrics and now let's flesh it out and put it into a legitimate song and a lot of stuff that happens in the song happens because we thought it was so entertaining to us to do something shocking and then go to an absolute screeching halt. To hit the brakes and go into a different direction, because we wanted to see what we could create in shock and awe ourselves. It got to the point where we were writing a song and we figured out

that we had so many good ideas, and it was now time to finish the song and finalize the structure. There is one part of that song where we couldn't figure out, and I would listen to demos that we did where we rolled tape while we were practicing, there would be eight or nine minutes of us just noodling around and all of a sudden I heard a melody from the noodling in my head. I am in the parking lot of the practice room and I called everybody saying, 'here guys listen to this!'. I fast forwarded to the parts of the songs and played the music in the order of where I heard it in my head. I would say to everybody 'what if we try it like this' and everybody would be 'quick let's start up the amps!'. We went into the room and started the idea and looked at each other with that horror movie shock and OMG 'That's it! Now we have our answer.'

In a time where most progressive metal bands want to write symphonies or be over the top musicians like Dragonforce, the music has become cliché and a parody of itself without any hilarity involved, simply meaning that it's becoming overblown without reason, but as the band will stress to you, it's all about melding of different influences across the board that has created the ISD sound, "All of us in the band are Dream Theater fans first and foremost, we all love the band," continues Paxton, "Yes that is probably one of the strongest influences for us, but everybody in this band has a different origin in music. Everybody has a different starting point for their reference of what our rock and roll business should be. So when we see the influences come out in how we are writing the songs and how we are phrasing stuff to how we are performing on stage, it's a little less us trying to prove to be the next Dream Theater or the next whatever, we just want to make sure that everybody that sees us, they say that's a band that doesn't have an equal on the music scene."



"A lot of us have our own favorites," elaborates Piccoli, "I grew up when Grunge was popular, and yes I like Nirvana and Alice in Chains and all of them. Pete's a keyboardist, but he's a Van Halen fan and a King's X fan. We have the non progressive metal influences that creep their way in. Some of the song structures when you break it down, it's pretty simple, they're not too complicated. But when you look at them as a whole, there is more there. I think that label "progressive super metal," is our way – a tongue-in-cheek kind of way – to label ourselves not only as a band, but the people we are. Progressive rock is moving in a different direction while not taking the label of 'progressive rock' and just calling it whatever they want to. I would even almost consider The Flaming Lips as 'progressive' and they are really considered by most people as 'alternative' music. It's got to be what the artists wants to do, that's what it boils down to"

"Labeling stuff is so difficult," continues Paxtion, "we consider ourselves an indie rock band, but not in the sense of what most people would call indie rock. The same with being called progressive. When we call ourselves 'progressive super metal,' we say that with pride, but with a little cheesy comedy in there because, how do we label ourselves compared everything that s out there. I remember when Soundgarden and Pearl Jam hit the scene and thinking this is good rock and roll, and people would say 'no this is not rock and roll. This is grunge!'. I'm thinking, 'Wow that's typecasting for ya!'. A lot of music would benefit by not giving it a label. Don't tell them what the album is, just play it and see if they like it – I hate to admit this, but in the past, I simply didn't listen to the bands because a certain label was applied to them,

but when I finally listened to them and 'holy crap!' was I wrong. I hope that this label that we created for ourselves benefits. You need to describe a band to get people familiar with it, it's almost a challenge with all the bands out there to give a title to a genre of music, because they are changing every year"



Bryan Paxton

The one thing that this band recognizes, is that many bands, of all types of music tends to lack one of the most important element – the songwriting. As many bands tend to throw out their efforts in writing a memorable tune that has pop sophistication in favor of placing as many solos as they can within a song, it's good to hear that these guys know what the basis for good music is, even it might deviate from the whole paint by number scheme, as Paxton elaborates, "When we first listened to Tony's music as a band, we noticed that he has an ear for a hook and melody, after hearing a song, you go home and hear these songs and you think, 'I can't get this out of my head' – and yet he covers it with bucket loads of ideas, crazy songwriting, and ideas for how a musical progression should go. This is not intro, verse, chorus, guitar solo, verse, chorus outro..., this is not that kind of predictable rock and roll. But at the same

time, you have that predictable feel of 'I'm going to hear a melody in the song' or 'I'm going to have a hook that catches your ear,' that I don't hear in prog rock songwriting where they go gonzo with the songwriting and there is no substance there that you can grab onto, as a fan or by accident, or by hearing it live. There are a lot of bands out there that can play anything, but there is no hook, no nothing to grab onto and say, now I get the song – I love the ridiculous musicianship, but I want to hear a hook."

Even with the album being released independently, the band is putting a plan into action to hopefully get a deal. But as this indie release shows, they aren't holding their breath. They are in the process of putting the numbers game of the music business in more of their favor by going out and making themselves known and not sitting around waiting for things happen. "We are in the process of sending this album out to every label we sort of have some kind of contact with," says Picolli, "we have a couple we are targeting and there has been some interest – I feel that someone is going to pick us up and it's going to be a good thing. Right now, we're just shopping it out there, but there is definitely interest."

And of course besides the Internet, actually going out and networking with people on a personal level has also helped ISD gain attention – and it also helped give them direction on where to go next. "When I went down to ProgPower and gave out the EP, everybody said this is good but you need a full product" explains Paxton, "Five songs isn't going to cut it, you need full album. When I went back and talked to the band, they agreed that it was the time to start working on a full album and it was a long way to get to the point from there to here, to finally have something to release upon the world. So now I have something to send out to the ProgPower crew, that they have been waiting for:"

Whether it's a one-time gig at a big festival such as ProgPower, some DJ picking up a tune for a station, plus music journalists of all types to bring their coverage to music lovers of all types – one big impression can change everything, even if it is something small, because the domino effect can arise from it and yield results. "You need to prove it to an completely random audience," says Paxton concluding the interview, "go to the strangers and catch their ear with the marketing and the promotion, that's how you get those anonymous ears. You have word of mouth and people talking about it, which is also powerful, if a talking dog can get a million hits on YouTube, why can't we do the same. Independently, we at least have control of what we do as opposed to having a record label telling us what to do – look at the movie 'That Thing You Do,' how the band called The Wonders was expected to record songs by bands on that label – you can expect that thing to happen – they will want to mold you and sculpt you into you want to mold you into what they feel is sellable. But for now, we are doing this on our own terms, so being independent has it's benefits."

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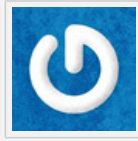
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