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Sebastian Elliot of BRAIN DANCE

Interview by Death Wish

From the trenches of New York's underground an innovative potion for the ears has been dreamt into being. Distilled from fast-paced roaring guitars, frighteningly erotic lyrics, and pressed into fluidity by complex orchestral arrangements, this alchemical blend has seeped out, into the music scene. This sinister sounding concoction is called Braindance, and just because you haven't heard it yet doesn't mean you can escape it's effects.

It's creators, Sebastian Elliot and Vora Vor, have brewed three intrinsically layered releases, and have another transmuting as we speak. As the curtain begins to rise on the next act for Braindance, that of the future, VF Magazine explored what darkly beautiful vision have they been dreaming up in the 7 years since their last album, Redemption.

Tell me a bit about the origin of Braindance, and how the band has evolved through the years.

As a young man putting off graduate school and the responsibility of a career in psychology, I met producer/guitarist Vora Vor and made a career of Braindance – writing material, developing lyrical concepts, and recording it all, some of which would appear two years later on the Shadows EP of 1994. Fear Itself followed in 1995, Redemption in 2001, and now, to coincide with the International Omelette Festival, comes Master of Disguise. Standard evolution – write songs, record songs, perform songs, write new songs, record new songs, perform new songs, write new songs...

Symbolism runs rampant through your work, so while this is usually a pretty standard question, I'm really curious what "Braindance" means to you.

Vora and I both grew up reading and collecting science fiction/fantasy novels and comics, and to this day, I'm a huge fan of comic art – the whole superheroes-wielding-magical-weaponry package, battling-evil-aliens-for-the-control-of-the-universe type thing. I've got enough reality in my life, so I make quite an effort to gravitate towards the other world, especially where Braindance is concerned. All of the album covers and inserts feature high-quality symbolic illustration by gifted artists, have symbolic themes running through and between them, and are symbolically most certainly related to the symbolic material contained symbolically within.

Lyrically, I believe in a good measure of ambiguity. Most Braindance songs are imported into a construct that is fantasy-based in setting. Naturally, the themes have specific meanings for me, but I try not to assign too many definitive conceptual values to the symbols in that construct, simply because it might translate differently for you. Insofar as everyone's experiences are different, so should their interpretations be. Whereas I might see a symbol representing despair and desolation, someone else might see a symbol communicating an egg salad sandwich.

Having said that, our music is still quite subjective. Along with wanting to produce music that represents a unique voice, along with wanting to push the limits of what is out there and what you've created for yourself, is the hope that this shit actually means something to you. That it defines at least a part of you. Behind the lyrical symbolism are meanings about real issues that have governed my life over the last few years. For me, Master of Disguise will be our lyrically darkest yet, and personally speaking, I'm hoping that there won't be one this dark ever again...

While you've rather consistently played live over the past few years, you haven't released an album since 2001, and there was a five-year gap between that and its precursor. Of course, you're not the only band to take breaks between albums, but is there any story behind these gaps?

Indeed there is a story—one that involves a time machine and a hopscotch-champion lobster with Parkinson's disease that is currently in discussions for a live action feature film.

You're due to release *Master of Disguise* in the fall. What's the official release date?

The official release date is before the end of time.

What can existing fans expect from *MoD*? How do you plan to lure in new ones?

Combine the sheer excitement of Swiss almond coffee ice cream with the danger of aged Manhattan clam chowder and you're still nowhere close. With regards to the material, we've taken everything that worked before and took it to the next level – production, performances, songwriting, lyrical imagery, artwork – everything has matured considerably. Joe 'Sweetrot' Simko just finished the inside cover art for *Master of Disguise*, and I couldn't be more excited. In addition to the packaging, we still plan on luring in new fans with attractive spokesmodels, adorable company mascots and festive full-page magazine advertisements...

Surely you're asked to describe this a lot, but what does "progressive darkwave" mean to you?

When we first started Braindance, we never really knew exactly what it was that we were doing in the sense of categorization. It was only after receiving press and response from the underground community that we came to be familiar with all of those little descriptive terms about music that vary from person to person like gothic, progressive, darkwave, industrial, epic, etc., etc., etc...In fact, I'm still not clear (and have yet to receive a satisfactory textbook explanation) on what those terms and their respective boundaries are. Perhaps if I had been clear on those terms and how they were supposed to be communicated musically, we'd be doing something completely different than Braindance, something completely identifiable, and probably be more successful by this point.

"Progressive Darkwave" was simply a

phrase that was engineered to save some time and simplify description. Humans, especially recently, like to have their information color-coded and labeled in bite-size chunks of easily understood descriptive boxes. It was a phrase that was created in lieu of explaining elements in our music that others needed to hear in order to work with it or understand it on whatever level. It was a phrase that hopefully would communicate dense programming, multi-layered composition,



performance with a technical slant, distinct vocal melodies, and/or a lyrical content of a darker nature. It might be a phrase that fans of dark metal, ebm/ electro, progressive metal, guitar-driven industrial, dark ambient, and dark house would understand. It would be a phrase that spoke of elements of goth, synthpop, darkwave, progressive trance, doom, vocal house, modern classical music mixed with enough pop sensibilities to make anyone nauseous.

With regards to comparisons, however, I've heard everything from Rammstein meets Paradise Lost meets Depeche Mode meets Queensrÿche meets Type O Negative

meets Delerium meets Dream Theater meets Fear Factory meets Pink Floyd meets Sisters of Mercy meets KMFDM meets Hilary Duff. Some simply call it progressive darkwave, others call it doody.

Progressive Darkwave is also the name of your record label. How has preparing for an independent release affected the band in regards to creative control over the music as well as the ability to really get your name out there?

Progressive Darkwave Recordings was created simply as a business buffer for the band's activities. Out of necessity, we've had to learn production, engineering, publicity, promotion, and management as we went, because I believed that we owed it to ourselves to become recording artists. The underground fans, press, and radio have been always been exceedingly beneficent, whereas in the past the labels have had no clue what to do with us. Because what we do crosses a few different sub-genres, there seemed to be no 'niche' for us, even in the independent world, which prides itself on promoting new, exciting, underground music. Independent labels as well as majors have risk to contend with, and they've got to be sure that your music has succeeded in other realms – someone must have had one of you, and have done rather well with them. In the past, it seems we've always been too metal for goth labels, too goth for progressive metal labels, too progressive metal

for industrial labels, too industrial for guitar-driven labels, too guitar-driven for dance labels, too dance for metal labels, etc., etc., etc...Hopefully, that's about to change...Until then, we retain full creative control over ourselves and hope to get the name out there by sending personalized croissants to every home across the globe...

Many artists, especially in this scene, sometimes have difficulty striking the balance that you've managed between a visual aesthetic and the music. How important is the visual aspect of Braindance compared to the musical aspect, and how do you keep one from overwhelming the other?

The visual aspect in *Braindance* is not as important as the musical aspect, unless I happen to put on more weight than expected in a short period of time. To keep the visual aspect from overwhelming the musical aspect, I adhere to a low-carb, fiber-rich, protein-based organic diet and a healthy serving of daily cardiovascular activity.

Do you currently have a touring lineup in place? What can you tell me about the musicians you're playing live with?

Braindance consists of Vora Vor, responsible for production, programming, arrangements, and guitars, and myself, responsible for minced onions, parsley, and braised shallots. We have between three and five revolving members, human and otherwise, responsible for percussion, basses, keyboards, voices, and a myriad of other aural excitements that we'll be performing with live, soon after *Master of Disguise* is released.

Currently, we're looking for a drummer, a bassist, and a (female) keyboardist/backing vocalist. We have interested parties, but have yet to formally begin auditions. If you think you've got what it takes and smell really good, please let us know at progressivedarkwave.com...

You've never been shy about your love of comics and comic art. Any favorite artists or titles?

I'm a comic fanatic—Spider-man, Daredevil, Batman, Spawn, The Punisher, The Darkness, Witchblade, and Pitt—I guess Marvel and Top Cow are the big players for me. In fact, I just went to the New York Comic Convention and paid a visit to the great Marc Silvestri and the talented guys at Top Cow Productions, and confessed my desire to play Jackie Estacado in an upcoming *Darkness* film. I'm not sure, but I think he was laughing at me. Internally.

What are your thoughts about the growing trend in comic-book films? Any favorites? Do you think comic films have jumped the shark yet, or do you foresee that day coming?

I don't know, but I still have faith in Hollywood as mankind's saviour—especially all that soulless C.G.I. stuff. The proliferation of comic-book films is probably the only societal craze that hasn't made me wince. I've been a long-time fan of many legendary comic, sci-fi, or fantasy adventure films such as *Star Wars*, *Highlander*, *Dune*, *Conan*, *Dark City*, *The Matrix*, *The Fifth Element*,

Sin City, & *Total Recall*. In fact, I would love to find a comic artist willing to bring the events depicted on the *Braindance* album covers to life in either a graphic novel or an animated feature. Of course, they'll have to wait until after the action figures have arrived.

Okay, reigning this back in here. *Braindance* has a very rich, unique sound. Are you listening to anything inspiring lately (new or classic), and would you have any recommendations for our readers?

I'm a big fan of any and all hybrid music that combines musical intelligence with a darker intensity and a signature sound. Currently I'm listening to a lot of house, progressive trance, and classical music. I'm also listening to nifty Metropolis stuff like *In Strict Confidence*, *Hocico* and *Velvet Acid Christ*. I'm also listening to some progressive metal like *Kamelot*, *Pyramaze* and *Evergrey*, some thrashy melodic stuff like *Dark Tranquility*, *Killswitch*, *Arch Enemy*, and *Lamb of God*; *Priest*, some *Maiden*, *Zeppelin*, *Jorn* and old *Whitesnake*; anything by *Noise Unit* or *Delerium*; *Juno Reactor*; *Pink Floyd*; some soundtracks, some '70s compilations, the *John 5* record, *Katatonia*, the latest *Scar Symmetry*, *Opeth*, *Leaves' Eyes*, *Beatles*, *Bach's Musical Offering*, *Manuel Barrueco*, a lot of *Anthony Robbins*. No other recommendations other than to utilize an oatmeal-based moisturizer with UV protection after bathing.



BRAINDANCE—REDEMPTION

Progressive Darkwave Recordings
Reviewed by DeathWish

It was once implied to me that Symphonic Dark Metal/Goth was a dying genre. For the sake of argument I'm thankful for the twisted, macabre creation of Sebastian Elliot and Vora Vor, whose ominous creature cloaked in darkness and all it's

splendors bring this disagreement to an end, not unlike a vampire or unforeseen force halts the flight of a scared virgin upon your silver screens. Crawling out of its crypt in '94, this vile fiend called *Braindance* has released *Redemption*, a musical attack sure to have you clenching your lover for comfort.

Redemption comes to steal your breath and soul with not only its intricate compositions but the return of captivating comic art from Kinchi from Kinchimagic Multimedia Productions. This horrific monstrosity begins with the sample laden track "Refracture" warning listeners of the haunting punishment to come from their vanity, encompassing the spectator in a fury of carefully constructed organs and surgically slicing guitar riffs. Sebastian's deep, chilling, and frightening vocals offer a rolling dimension to this song not seen since Type O's *Bloody Kisses* days, its seductiveness sure to leave the ladies craving more. This is followed by the ethereal experience (and my personal favorite on this album) entitled "Resurrection"; light notes of an eerie xylophone lead you forth to a swirling guitar arpeggio as Sebastian paints a lyrical picture of blackened forests and restless spirits, finally culminating to a duo of Sebastian and Vora chanting "lead the way, lead the way and be my guide." Upon escaping the enticing grasp "Resurrection" enticing grasp, the listener is whisked away, carried along by cacophony of flowing notes and samples to *Braindance's* guitar masterpiece "Resurgence", with its crunchy riffs beckoning you to worship upon an altar of arpeggiated scales and trills.

Without reluctance or hesitation "Redemption" is the perfect example of the brilliance found within a genre of mesmerizing symphonic sounds and guitar metal coupled with a composition style once only found exclusively within the annals of Industrial Music history. *Braindance* is paving new ground for future musicians to take notice, while entertaining your darkest fantasies and fears. This release indeed is a must have and "it's oh, so very tasty"!