

Soilwork



Once thought to be merely a contender for the much respected, yet just as notorious NWOS-DM (New Wave of Swedish Death Metal) scene's growing legion of mind-blowing acts, Soilwork have risen from the ranks of mere bench-warmers to key players on a field full of formidable opponents like In Flames and Dark Tranquillity. It's nowhere else more evident than here, at their concert tonight in Corona, where even headliner Hypocrisy's fans are drowned out by the Soilworkers' rabid and fanatical followers, screaming for their heroes to tear down the venue. Even the L.A. Weekly, one of the city's most respected newspapers for its articles on up-and-coming music from all parts of the world, has praised the band's "intelligent" thrash-meets-progressive metal experimentation. I had a chance to meet with vocalist Björn "Speed" Strid and mastermind/guitarist Peter Wichers, right by the tour buses before this anarchistic (and all-around just incredible) display of fiery aggression and bravado took place.

E.I: How do you feel you've progressed since the days of "Steelbath Suicide"?

Soilwork (Peter): "Well, a lot of things have happened since that time. If I look back at that, I can't believe we're at the point we're at now, because we didn't have goals like that when we first started. But with every record, you kind of get hungry for more stuff, y'know, so you never get (satisfied). I just think that, as musicians, we've evolved a lot. On the new album we worked a lot on making the song structures a lot more catchy than we have before, so looking back right now from that point to where I am now I'm very proud of what we've become as a band".

E.I: Who writes most of the rhythm guitar parts, you or Ola?

Soilwork: "Well, I think it's safe to say that I'm the main composer, but at the same time Ola's doing a lot of work as well. When I come up with a song idea, usually everybody comes with their own ideas for the song too. Usually I'm the main composer but Ola writes about two or three songs".

E.I: I noticed the increase of melody on this album-an obvious example of how you've progressed since "Steelbath Suicide". How much did Devin

Townsend (producer, Strapping Young Lad frontman) have to do with that?

Soilwork: "Actually, we made all the songs before we went into the studio. Devin just took certain parts and made them what he thought could be better, in his opinion. Before we'd only do twin harmonies-one vocal track and then another one. But this time we had like 30 tracks in the vocals and other stuff, and it sounds big, and that's what he wanted to achieve.

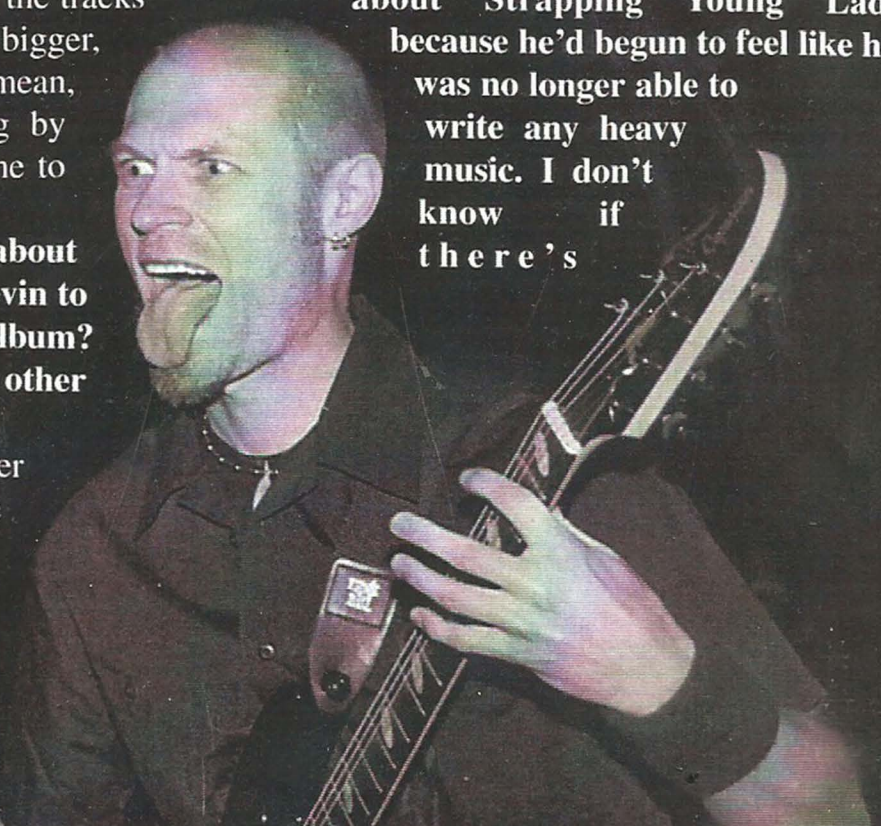
A lot of people just copy the tracks (on computer), to make it bigger, but we do everything-I mean, all 30 layers were sung by Bjorn. It takes a long time to do something like that!"

E.I: How did you go about getting in touch with Devin to help out with the new album? Did you guys know each other before?

Soilwork: "No, I'd never met Devin before he came to Gothenburg. We just spoke over the phone and I sent him pre-recordings of the songs, so he could kind of hear what was going

on. I got in touch with him myself because I'd been a fan of his for a long time. I called him up and asked if he was interested, and he said 'Yeah, I'm very interested!' Because he wants to get his whole production thing going. I'm just hoping that it'll help him out... It's also safe to say that the latest album is the most well played as far as the instruments, and a lot of that is thanks to Devin".

E.I: I'd heard that he was worried about Strapping Young Lad, because he'd begun to feel like he was no longer able to write any heavy music. I don't know if there's



any truth to that which you know of...

Soilwork: "He's kind of an emotional guy, and that's what I like about him, because every song that he writes has emotions on it. The state of mind that he's in-that's how he writes his music. So when he was doing the Strapping... records, he, uh-".

E.I: Was pissed off.

Soilwork: "Yeah. He can't really control his temper when he's not on his medication. So he's not crazy, he just goes out of his mind if he doesn't take the pills. He can't drink when he's on his medication; it fucks up his kidneys. So he just smokes pot. But I think he's getting back to his old state of mind-where he was at before all this chaos happened to him. That's the reason he's been doing albums like Ocean Machine, Terria, stuff like that. But they're making a new Strapping... record right now. He tells me it's gonna be the most extreme stuff he's ever done, and that he'll release a solo album at the same time... He's a maniac".

E.I: Going back to the first album which broke you guys out mainstream- "The Chainheart Machine"- there was obviously a concept thing going on there, with people working underneath the earth to make it move... and I also got sort of a similar vibe on "A Predator's Portrait", the next one.

Soilwork: "'A Predator's Portrait' was kind of a concept album, but... Bjorn always writes about stuff he can relate to. He's very interested in crime history and stuff like that, so a lot of the tracks that are written on that record relate to some mental state of mind-crazy guys and murderers. But he doesn't write about them in a positive way, he just feels like he has something to say about it. He's good with that".

E.I: On the new album, is there anything like this as far as lyrics?

Soilwork: "On the new album, it's more about what he's been going through in his ordinary life. He works with problem kids... kids who have had a bad upbringing, who went through divorces with their parents. He just likes helping people out; he's a very nice guy, and if anybody has a problem he's usually there to help them. He's a good friend to people in need. Basically all the lyrics are written by Bjorn".

It's here that vocalist Bjorn Strid steps off the bus, and I'm introduced to him.

E.I: Hey man, what's up?

Soilwork (Bjorn): "Hey, how's it going?"

E.I: What made you decide to start singing certain song parts on the last two records?

Soilwork (Bjorn): "I guess I just wanted to try something else, try to develop my singing. I sang a little when I was a kid, and I have a vocal coach-h e ' s

helped me a lot with singing. It works out pretty good to combine those two vocal styles. It gets very exhausting, too. You just have to breathe when there is time to, that's very important. I just use the same technique with breathing for both styles, just (he motions to his stomach)-breathing from here. It's a challenge, but I like challenges of all kinds".

E.I: Do people think you're selling out by doing more melodic stuff?

Soilwork (Bjorn): "Nah, not really. The reason we're doing stuff like the melodic vocals is that we think we can still expand with the vocals by doing that. I mean, it's still heavy on the verses, but the choruses get so much more interesting with melodic vocals. That's the reason why we're doing that".

E.I: I'm curious as to what really inspired you and other bands in the New Wave of Swedish Death Metal. Besides a lot of old American thrash groups, I mean.

Soilwork (Bjorn): "That's kind of hard to say, I guess. These NWOSDM bands have a lot of folk traditions, especially like on the first two In Flames albums, you know... It's very hard to say, exactly. (laughs) Just a couple of Swedes playing music, y'know...and it took off".

E.I: What about you as a vocalist? Do you have any influences personally?

Soilwork (Bjorn): "Yeah, Devin Townsend. The lead singer for Kreator, too. Uh, Tom Araya, from Slayer. Rob Halford and Ronnie James Dio".

E.I: So you're hoping that "Natural Born Chaos" is the album that helps you take off...

Soilwork (Bjorn): "Yeah, I hope so! I think it's got some potential to take off. We just want to tour and be able to have music be our lives. That's our dream".

Jeff Nau

**"It's also safe to say that the latest album is the most well played as far as the instruments, and a lot of that is thanks to Devin".
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