

A conversation with Faith & The Muse, Part Two

Written by Thom Carnell
Monday, 13 December 2010 16:59



In [part one](#), FANGORIA spoke to the ambient duo, Faith & The Muse about their formation and intentions as a band, and cinematic hopes. Below, they discuss their most recent releases, the album :ANKOKU BUTOH: and DVD SHOUMEI and their respective creations.

FANGO: Can you talk a little bit about what changes :ANKOKU BUTOH: marked for the band?

FAITH: I don't think it marked a specific departure of any variety. I'd say more than anything that it was just a continuing progression and evolution in what we're doing.

RICHARDS: I do think one aspect though is that we brought a great deal more of the organic instrumentation that we had started with – which I think maybe we'd lost a little of by EVIDENCE OF HEAVEN and THE BURNING SEASON.

FAITH: I would agree with that, absolutely. For me, that's more of a cyclical thing because with ELYRIA, of course, that was primarily organic instrumentation. Then, with ANNWYN we moved away a bit more. EVIDENCE a bit more. BURNING SEASON definitely more. So, yeah... In that respect, I agree with Monica. It's bringing it back down to a more visceral delivery.

RICHARDS: Getting our hands dirty again and going back into the creation of it with our hands

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as opposed to plunking it out on keyboards. When I wrote “She Waits By The Well,” I did a few drum loops just to give William the idea of what I was looking for. When we brought it into the actual studio and William started to do the Taiko drumming, he brought it to an entirely different level and an entirely different emotion.

FAITH: We hadn’t recorded that way in some time, so getting back to that was absolutely refreshing.

FANGO: What are the central themes of :ANKOKU BUTOH:?

RICHARDS: A lot of it is definitely back to empowerment, back to taking life by the throat, losing complacency... It’s definitely a call to arms.



FAITH: Some of what is expressed in the pieces that I sing are basically trying to shake people out of their stupor. In the case of “Nine Dragons,” the lyrics have a definite pitch, but at the same time, the song’s essentially about a siege. Rather than drawing any conclusion as to location, purpose, and intent, I like to leave it open so people can adapt it to whatever war it is they’re currently fighting or need to fight in their own lives. “Sovereign” is the same way. It’s about stepping up and taking pride in yourself, for people who find themselves a bit beaten down, a bit sullen about their place in life, it’s really about trying to find yourself again.

FANGO: Talk to me a little bit about the inclusion of the Taiko drums.

FAITH: It was one of these things where the way the album coalesced; it was, once again, a very organic process. Monica had found out a little about the Shinto religion and had been

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interested in that. J-horror had piqued our interest, so we were starting to watch a lot of Japanese horror film around that time. We were starting to assemble a rough vision of what we wanted the album to sound like and Taiko drums had been something we'd both been interested in. Monica had seen [renown Japanese Taiko drum ensemble] Kodo before and I'd been fascinated by seeing them in a variety of applications. Then, Monica found Butoh [a Japanese style of dance and storytelling] and sent me the link and I kind of ran with it. So, these things all kind of go into a loose orbit and we started to get a vision of it. Taiko drums seemed to be the floor that we were going to build on because we knew the album was going to roar a bit, was going to have a bit of an aggressive voice. The title "ANKOKU BUTOH" itself, which means "dance of utter despair," was something we didn't intend to be taken literally. It was much more of a commentary on the place we found ourselves in the world. We decided the album was going to have a bit of a martial feel and Taiko drums seemed to underscore that perfectly. At that point, I started investigating them a bit further and did a workshop with Sensei Tom Kurai who teaches in Los Angeles. After that, I started studying and learning a bit of the culture of the instrument, the history, the techniques, specific rudiments, and different songs. I studied it much in the way I've studied other instruments, learning just enough so that I felt that I had a loose grasp on it and then taking it and adapting it for my own purposes. I spent more time studying Taiko than I have anything else because I really wanted to portray it accurately. I wanted it to really roar and be out front. So, I spent some time polishing it.

FANGO: Monica, tell me about the packaging on "ANKOKU BUTOH".

RICHARDS: We decided to do it in Japanese order - reading from back to front - and it's a little bit like an art book. I decided to do a great deal of visuals to go with the lyrics and the overall tone that goes through the book. At the same time, due to the whole cyclical fashion and the idea of nature, the book starts in Winter and, by the time it ends, we are in Spring.

FANGO: Did you do all of the artwork?

RICHARDS: I had my friend, Jim Neely, who does my book, *Anafae*, with me. He did a few pieces, as did Ava Heydt who did the shadow puppets for our "Battle Hymn" video. So, I had a couple of artists who sent me some pieces, but overall, I did all the design work.

FANGO: And what is SHOUMEI?

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RICHARDS: SHOUMEI is the :ANKOKU BUTOH: tour captured on DVD. It's an entire live show that was shot in Houston. Our friend, Marc Moorash, who did the "Battle Hymn" video, set it up so that we had seven cameras and a twenty-four-track recording. The first seven tracks are pretty much seamless because it goes from [dance duo] Serpentine coming on stage at the beginning to halfway through the set with no stops.

FANGO: So, now that the world tour is done, is it back to writing and recording?

FAITH: Right now, it's time to take a break and sort of regroup. We've done a ton of shows and we're just putting out SHOUMEI now, so that should keep the fans happy for a little while.

RICHARDS: :ANKOKU BUTOH: is one of those projects where, from inception of the album content all the way through to the end of the tour, it's taken a lot out of us. It's an absolute labor of love. We've enjoyed every minute of doing it, but it was a huge effort for the last two years. It's time for us to take a moment to take a breath before we decide what we're going to do next.

FANGO: If people want to get in contact with you in order to get some of the CDs or DVDs or even for potential film work, what is the best way to do that?

RICHARDS: Everything we have is available through [Mercy Ground](#) and we can be contacted through the web site or at info@mercyground.com.

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