

BLACK YET FULL OF STARS – interview CARLO – TNT Radio, By José A. Marroqui “Brujo”

Before starting the interview, I would like to congratulate Carlo for this GREAT work. “Dark Wing Gospel” is an epic and sublime album that manages to awaken a multitude of emotions and sensations. Thank you for this gift Carlo.

How do you feel after listening to the final result of this album?

Answer – I see what you did there! Thank you my friend, I’m glad to hear you liked it. I feel pretty good! I’ve sat on it truly a long time, between work, Covid and finding the right people to bring it to life, so it’s very satisfying to finally have it in my hands physically. Of course I only hear things I’d change and do differently right now, but in that sense, I think nothing is ever really finished! I’m certainly very satisfied.

Well, to get to know better the musician and composer behind Black Yet Full of Stars, who is Carlo Dini? Because you have worked on film soundtracks and death metal bands, and you are a fan of telling stories in all their forms and styles.

Answer – Yeah! I moved to the Netherlands to finish my studies in ancient literature, and actually whilst writing my thesis I did most of the research for the “lore” of this album. I moved here mostly for University, because my plan A was becoming a teacher, but studying with the people I studied with absolutely killed my passion for that, and I turned to my main one, which is of course music! I opened my company Nowhere Music after years of taking the courage to do that, and thankfully everything is going well. I mostly work with orchestra and I mostly did bands and artists. I also indeed work for films, theatre and games – but these latter three are the rarest of collaborations.

I believe that your first steps were with electric guitar until you became an orchestral composer, your journey has been remarkably diverse. How has your training in classical music and your experience in metal bands influenced your unique style of composition?

Answer – I think that because the scale was tipped in favor of classical music and film scores, I abandoned the metal style of writing relatively early. Hopefully it’s something people can hear in this album, but in any case, I wrote the whole thing so that it could stand on its own feet with just the orchestra. The metal band was arranged on top of that. So you don’t really have your standard “riff” with metal phrasing and arrangements, at least that’s what I felt whilst writing. Some harmonic choices in particular, would have never come to me if I only wrote on guitar, thinking as I would when I write for a band.

What do you think distinguishes your approach within symphonic metal?

Answer – I feel like it’s mostly what I explained to you above. I hear a lot more of the metal element in symphonic metal, like how the crescendo is released into the satisfaction of a breakdown and alike. I think I’m much more concerned with how the song unfolds and how the lyrics go, and how the orchestra can repeat the same parts (because, at the end of the day, I’m writing a song, not a symphony), without playing the exact same thing. So the arrangements constantly grow and change, even when, for example, the verse is the same, and such.

Besides Black Yet Full of Stars, where can we find Carlo, what other bands or works have you participated in?

Answer – My most regular collaborators are the guys of Voodoo Kungfu. Nan (their mastermind) is truly a one of a kind brain and voice, and blends all sorts of folk elements with dubstep, extreme metal and orchestra. I've made their orchestrations for a few years by now, and the releases are all behind the corner. I worked for many bands in the past, like Kalmhain, Noxus, Ade, Nightland...

You have worked in a variety of genres, from death metal bands to film compositions. How do you transfer the orchestral sensibility you have cultivated in your career to the symphonic and progressive metal of Black Yet Full of Stars?

Answer – I don't think it's something I actively try to do, I guess it's just stuff that becomes part of your vocabulary at some point, and you just create as a consequence. Actually exactly because I work on so many things as you said, I'm quite excited at the idea of keeping Black Yet Full of Stars a symphonic metal project, but I'm looking forward to try more styles and genres, and stealing all that I think would work in that context. As far as orchestra sensibility is concerned, because I really want that to be the focus of the project, it also depends on what I'm gonna tackle next. Each thing has its own language and clichés I think. So worst case scenario, I learn new things!

I said earlier that you define yourself as a fan of telling stories, and this is transferred to your music. How is this passion for telling stories reflected in your music and how do you integrate it into your compositions?

Answer – I feel like that could mostly be the way I write lyrics. I remember that was something I struggled with for a very long time, because other artists write lyrics in such a different way. I think that between the fact that I've had to study way too much poetry to survive university, and the fact that I have a story to tell, I am always very "narrative" and try to write lyrics that have sense, also in a chronological way. I describe way too much, and Ludo made fun of me for that in quite a few occasions. But honestly it helps me keeping things organized to tell what I want to tell, and it helps when I'm orchestrating because I know that if I'm talking about this same thing, over a theme that I used before for something else, then I know what to change to fit the story, whether to reverse the theme, mirror it, make it minor and alike.

We find a wide amalgam of influences in Black Yet Full of Stars, both inside and outside of metal. But in order to get an idea of what music moves your heart, I will ask you what are your five favorite albums. The ones that you think have defined you over the years.

Answer – Damn dude. Let's see... For obvious reasons, either Once or Imaginaerum by Nightwish have to go between these five. They opened my mind to a number of things I didn't know were possible. I love those. "New Blood" by Peter Gabriel is also a record that I consumed and studied to death, and it was how I intended to originally release Dark Wing Gospel. The orchestral version that's coming up in 2025, "In Glorious Red", will probably make this a lot clearer. Next would be the score of Dracula by Wojciech Kilar. No extra information is needed. Then any Manowar album. They ruined my teenage years and I love them for it. Finally the score to Penny Dreadful by Abel Korzeniowski.

"Dark Wing Gospel" has an impressive cinematic atmosphere. It is the soundtrack of a dark and epic film, full of intrigue at the same time, and a roller coaster of emotions envelops you in each cut. There is a great evolution between this and your first album from 2016 ("Black Yet Full of Stars"). The approach between them has changed drastically. What has changed in these eight years in your way of composing and seeing music?

Answer – I think that my first record was 100% made of naïve thoughts. To make a long, old story short, I thought I had a band up until it was time to record, and then I realized I didn't. But all the music we worked at when we were 16/18 sounded good and fun only when we played it in a room together. When it was time to record and things really didn't go my way, I didn't second guess anything and just went with what we had. I don't have many fond memories of that first album. But it's there and it's a piece of what I made, so why not keeping it there. In the eight years that passed, well, everything changed! Music went from a hobby to my daily work, and from something I made in my room purely with the intent to be noisy, to something I love and love to understand and study. A part of me thinks "Dark Wing Gospel" is my actual first album, because I know that everything on this is my fault, down to the last detail. And I love that.

The composition process of "Dark Wing Gospel" was somewhat different than usual, creating the orchestral and vocal lines first, and then adding the metal part. How did this reverse approach influence the final result of the album?

Answer – I think it added to the "cinema" vibe of it, but could have perhaps made it flatter on a band level. I really don't know. I know that, as I said before, working with just orchestra made me think in ways that I would never think of on guitar. Probably just because I'm not good on guitar, but you know... I'm always a bit of a slave to a certain pattern or chord voicing or hand position. Working this way really made me step out of that forma mentis. Hopefully, I can manage to find a better balance between the two. We'll see. But to answer you in a quicker manner, I think it made me more original, and forced me to arrange the band in a way I normally wouldn't.

You have mentioned that the album has a unique mix of progressive, power and symphonic metal, but with a more subtle approach to the guitar riffs and solo parts. What decisions did you make to ensure that the orchestration had a leading role, without the metal being relegated to the background?

Answer – I told this to everyone that touched the parts. When in doubt, check the orchestra. Michiel made all of his drumming decisions without any guitars whatsoever, for example. When I sent everything off for mixing, I told Simone to pay almost zero attention to the guitars. They have to be there, for sure, but I want the orchestra and the voices to have the main roles. And I guess it worked out.

On the album you have collaborated with very talented musicians, such as Michiel van der Plicht (Pestilenze, God Dethroned), Ludovico Cioffi (Delain) or Davide Penna (Mirrormaze) among others. How did you select the collaborators for this project and how did each one contribute to the overall atmosphere of Dark Wing Gospel?

Answer – Honestly, apart from Ludo, which I have known for quite a long time, with my great pleasure, it was mostly a matter of first impressions. I loved how Michiel talked about his instrument and he just came across like such a great confident guy. And of course, two minutes online and you can immediately find out how good he plays. Davide wasn't any different. I had many try-outs before him, and I was left speechless by the behavior of certain singers (triple A names included – I've killed some of my own heroes talking to few of them!). Talking to him was a breath of fresh air. If you are great at what you do AND you aren't a piece of ****, you're my favorite type of person to work with, regardless.

Do you see yourself bringing the musical complexity of Black Yet Full of Stars to the live stage, or is it just a studio project?

Answer – I think something like Dark Wing Gospel wouldn't be realistic live. Making this with backing tracks would be probably a little sad. Making this with a few real pieces on stage would be awesome, but just as unrealistic for an independent artist. We'll see what the future brings. What I can tell you is that one of the next chapters I'm working on for Black yet Full of Stars will be written specifically to be performed live, with a smaller chamber ensemble I'm currently recruiting.

Also, to further polish the greatness of "Dark Wing Gospel", you have enlisted the help of Stefano Morabito (Fleshgod Apocalypse) and Simone Mularoni (Rhapsody, Vision Divine). What do you think they have contributed to the final result of the album?

Answer – I think Stefano is an absolute tone machine, and immediately understood what I wanted in terms of good full guitars that wouldn't have masked the orchestra too much. He absolutely nailed it in the head! Simone of course contributed by crafting an awesome mix, it was our first time working together but I manage to explain my vision and he was kind enough to listen. We had a few interesting "I think the orchestra is too high here" moments. It was very funny just replying "I think it could be louder". Happy times. He is very satisfied with the mix too.

The central theme of "Dark Wing Gospel" is fascinating: an alchemist turned serial killer, with dark and complex lyrics. How did those ideas come about? Did you draw inspiration from anything in particular, such as the history of alchemy or historical figures, to develop this narrative on the album?

Answer – Most of the "lore" came up during my university years. My master's thesis was on ancient magic, and I stumbled over many fascinating traditions. I wanted to put them all together and see what would come up. Many movies and real stories went into inspiring the character, I wouldn't know where to start from! The moth "inspiring" the murders is an idea I got by reading about the Son of Sam – who at some point said he committed his crimes because a dog told him to. The alchemical part I took from mainly the writing of Jung, together with Eliphas Levi and a few others. The ancient Greek things, such as the rites of Akephalos, the potential relationship it has with Abraxas, and so on, are all things I added after completing my thesis.

The album presents a complex narrative with movements ranging from hope to despair. How does the use of orchestration and progressive metal help to express the emotional evolution of the characters, especially the protagonist, in his search for resurrection?

Answer – I think this is something I tried to achieve mostly by trying to make the album progressively "angry" and ugly. The idea behind having growls was also that the darker thoughts of the character would have been sung with growls, whilst the noble intents would be the clean vocals. I tried to achieve the same with the music: the noble bits of his thought processes are the slightly "happier" harmonic bits, whilst the dark ones are the dissonant, very minor passages.

Let's talk a little about the songs. There are great moments, always marked by a dark and horror-like atmosphere, in which we find epic cuts like "The Great Work," which has reminded me at times of albums like that opera by Nikolo Kotzev's Nostradamus, or of great

composers like Arjen Anthony Lucassen in songs like “Albedo, Ancient Heart,” which seems to me to be one of the great songs on the album. Even moments of “Rubedo, The Artist” have reminded me of Lucassen's Star One, with those heavy rhythms. It's hard not to find references to great composers in “Dark Wing Gospel,” isn't it?

Answer – Damn man, thank you! There are definitely a lot of straight up stolen textures, especially in the orchestras. I would love to name them all but I'm scared to get in trouble. I can tell you that if it was a score of dark fantasy film from the 90s or early 2000s, there's probably some bits that I stole and threw in the record.

Also, there are those who mention bands like Therion, Rhapsody or Adagio when attributing influences to you. How do you manage to balance your influences in orchestral music and symphonic metal with your own style, to avoid falling into a mere imitation of those big names?

Answer – I think that this one is an easy one for me, because my metal knowledge is extremely limited! My conscience is very clean from that point of view. Some of the bands that I get compared to I have never even heard before! It's quite interesting as a phenomenon... So I don't really know how to reply to this, I think that becoming a straight up imitation is impossible if you don't actively try to copy the work of someone else head to toe. If someone happens to say that I sound like a band I admire, to be honest I'd take it as a compliment.

How do you see Black Yet Full of Stars within the context of current symphonic metal? What do you hope people will think or feel when they hear this second album?

Answer –Context wise, I hope to come across as a more orchestral alternative to what I'm currently hearing in current metal, because of the reasons I explained you. There is a small part of me that would love to sound very boring to guitar players and very interesting to composers, for example. I hope it comes across as a coherent well told story that develops. I wish for whoever listens to have a good time, as if they were reading a (hopefully) good book.

Short and long-term future plans for Black Yet Full of Stars or Carlo Dini? What are you currently working on?

Answer – I'm working on the orchestra and voice only edition of the album, which will also have a bunch of extra songs that were supposed to become “metal” but that never did. It's gonna be a longer version, that will sound more like a soundtrack, I hope. I left all the vocals inside. Growls included! I think it'll be a first time for symphonic metal, to have the orchestral version of the album including the vocals. I hope people will like it. Long term plans, of course the next records, but I believe I will work with singles from now on. It will be easier to manage for me, and I will be able to release music more consistently.

Finally, once again congratulations on this wonderful work, “Dark Wing Gospel”, which must be among the best albums of 2025. Any message for those who are discovering you through this interview?

Answer – Thank you so much, it means the world to know you liked it. Thank you! And to whoever is reading, thank you too! I hope you can enjoy it, and that you'll keep your ears ready for what's to come. Thank you!!