

## **AN ABSTRACT ILLUSION [TNT Radio](#) Interview by José A. Marroqui “Brujo”**

**Karl Westerlund**

For those who are discovering An Abstract Illusion through their new album, how would you describe the essence of the project in a few words? And how has it changed since its beginnings?

**The aim has been the same from the beginning, to create emotional music that moves between dark and light, heavy and calm, chaos and beauty. I think we've gotten better at straddling that fence as time goes on.**

The Swedish extreme scene has a very strong identity when it comes to sound. Where does An Abstract Illusion fit within that sonic map? What elements connect you to that heritage, and which deliberately distance you from it?

**Good question! Even inside Swedish metal you have several camps. You have for example the Gothenburg melodic death metal camp and the Stockholm HM-2 death metal camp. Being from Northern Sweden, far from those two camps, we could craft our own identity without that outside influence.**

**I think something that's prevalent in Swedish music, and Nordic music in general, is a feeling of melancholy. Lonely soundscapes, sad melodies, that sort of stuff. We take a lot of inspiration from the cultural language of the Nordics.**

After Woe was hailed as a “masterpiece” by so many media outlets, was it difficult to face the challenge of composing something new without feeling like you had a giant shadow behind you?

**It could be cumbersome for sure. But at the same time we realize what a privilege it is to have created something that affects people that much, so we ended up embracing that shadow and it helped us raise the bar for ourselves. We have a strong belief in our composition and we've always written music that speaks to us, moves us, that gives us goosebumps. I feel like that has helped us with not being too burdened by the expectations.**

Between Woe and The Sleeping City, three years have passed in which the band's sound has evolved into something denser, more atmospheric, and layered. Has this transformation been a natural process, or was it a conscious decision to explore new sonic territories?

**Both. We've gotten better at the layering of different elements, but we've also made a conscious effort to weave the atmospheric elements into our music in a different way. In a way it's a progression of something we've always wanted to do, but now we're at a good enough skill-level where we can pull it off.**

The album's concept evokes a dystopian, science-fiction cityscape. What kind of images or emotions did you hope to evoke in the listener upon entering The Sleeping City?

**The hazy and dreamy atmosphere of an oppressive city that's half-way between the realms of the living and the dead.**

The album delves into the darkest corners of the human psyche and suffering. What drives you to explore these themes? Do you compose from personal experiences or from a more conceptual perspective?

**It might be a cliché for a metal band to deal with dark and uncomfortable topics, but for us they're interesting avenues to explore. Music is a way for us to express and maybe put into**

**words things that makes us anxious. Whether it be depression, the feeling of impending doom with regards to climate change, the murder of Emmett Till and the lack of justice in that case, how AI is replacing human creativity leaving us with nothing.**

The band's sound blends acoustic textures, complex structures, synthetic atmospheres, and extreme metal, but the result is surprisingly fluid. How do you balance these very different sound worlds without losing cohesion?

**We build the songs on a solid foundation that starts with a melody, or a chord progression, or maybe a riff. And then we start adding layers of acoustics, atmospheric elements and other details that makes us happy! We see what little lead part can be made with a synthesizer or if we can add a cool effect to a vocal track, the possibilities are endless. As long as the skeleton of the track is solid and has good pacing, we feel confident we can experiment away.**

You've worked with guest musicians who contributed strings (violins and cellos) and vocals on songs like Like a Geyser Ever Erupting, Frost Flower, and The Sleeping City itself. What were you aiming for with these collaborations, and how did they transform your original vision for The Sleeping City?

**I think it's easy now, in the world of top-class software plugins, to get lost in the digital world of samples. Don't get me wrong, they're definitely useful tools that we also make use of, but sometimes you want that human touch, that human feel, in the music. We recruited Jonathan, Flavia and Dawn for the strings to get those serene and beautiful strings you hear on the record. For the vocals, our live bassist Lukas has an amazing voice and he frequently contributes vocals live, so it would be malpractice for us not to use him on this album. It turned out great, his voice elevates the record whenever he's on it.**

The Sleeping City is an album full of contrasts between the devastating and the beautiful. We can range from the most extreme, bordering on black, in fragments of Like a Geyser Ever Erupting to more ethereal moments in Frost Flower. Do you see it as a reflection of the human being, capable of both extremes, or simply as a musical resource to keep the album's tension alive?

**The depth of the human spirit and the duality of man is definitely something reflected in the music. But at the same time we listen to a wide variety of music so it's only natural for our music to move between worlds.**

By the way, "Frost Flower" is, for me, one of the album's greatest songs. It's a track with a deep and crushing emotional charge. What can you tell us about this song?

**Thank you! It's a departure from anything we've done before, it's basically a death metal ballad in a sense. Influenced by the likes of Agent Fresco, Ólafur Arnalds, Leprous and Susanne Sundfør, basically influences we've always had but now lifted to the forefront. Dealing with the topic of drug abuse and how it washes over you, wears you out and drags you away.**

**It was basically a song that we felt "fuck it, let's do it", but people have so far embraced it which makes us very happy.**

With so many influences at play—death, black, ambient, post-metal, electronic—do you still feel a sense of belonging to a specific genre, or do you compose without thinking about it?

**Our main genre I would still say is progressive death metal, but we do not feel like we are constrained by just that label, we feel we have space to venture outside of that framework. Our composition is very mood-based. If there's something outside of metal that interests us, we ask ourselves; "Can we fit the mood, the vibe, of the music?" If the answer is yes, we will incorporate it.**

"Emmett" shows that you're not afraid to step outside the boundaries of extreme metal, incorporating jazz or symphonic nuances. Do you see this diversity as something occasional, or as an essential part of An Abstract Illusion's identity in the future?

**We incorporated jazz at some points in "Woe" and symphonics has been part of our sound in some way or another since the first EP. They're not a huge part of our sound, but it's interesting to incorporate them whenever the moment calls for it.**

Karl himself was in charge of production. How do you manage the balance between being a musician and producer without losing objectivity?

**It's not the easiest job in the world. But at the same time I feel more like a composer than a guitarist, so the marriage between the role of a composer and a producer is much more symbiotic in the sense that we do what's best for the song. What instrument plays what role in the song? Sometimes the guitar is in the front, sometimes it's more in the background. At other times maybe another instrument gets to shine. It's that balance you have to strike, while not being clouded by the feeling that "your" instrument needs to be leading the way all the time.**

The cover art, created by Alex Eckman-Lawn, is a tribute to classic black metal paintings. What were you trying to convey visually with it, and how does it fit with the atmosphere of The Sleeping City?

**Alex's art symbolizes the dream-like realm of the city where this whole album takes place. We always felt that purple is the color of sleep, of dreams, and the music and artwork reflects that.**

Could we say that this is An Abstract Illusion's most complex and ambitious album to date?

**Soundwise I would think so. It's our most "out there" record in terms of how we incorporate elements of synthwave and 80's cinematic soundtracks, as well as dreampop and shoegaze. We feel we've elevated the songwriting for this album in a much more intentional way than before. But at the same time we'd say "Woe" is structurally a more complex album by its nature as a 60-minute song.**

Just days away from the release of The Sleeping City, how have you felt about the reception of the first singles?

**It's been great! People have been receptive to the songs. Can't wait to show people the rest of the album.**

Once The Sleeping City is released on October 17th via Willowtip Records, what's next for An Abstract Illusion?

**Playing some gigs in support of the album and see what 2026 has to offer. After the press cycle for the album is over we'll take a small break to re-charge our batteries and then get back to work!**

Finally, what message would you leave for those reading this interview?

**Thanks for all the support, hope you check out the album. Give it a few spins to marinate, and don't expect Woe 2.0.**

Thank you very much for your time, and congratulations on this fantastic album.

**Thank you for your time and great questions!**