

WEFT – Interview with Charlie Anderson – TNT Radio (José A. Marroqui “Brujo”)

Hi José, thanks for having me, it's an honor!

The Splintered Oar is being released these days, and some previews have already started generating reactions from both the public and the specialized press. How are you experiencing this moment before the release? What are your impressions of the album's reception so far?

So far, it seems that some have deeply connected with the album. With how rapid-fire the release calendar is, I didn't expect the record to get nearly as much traction as it has. It is hard for debut records to break through these days.

For those who don't know you very well, you've been part of Panopticon as a violinist since 2019, and you've also collaborated with bands like Slumbering Sun and Waldgeflüster in recent years. How has all that experience influenced what you've created now with The Splintered Oar?

Every collaboration has been the fruit of beautiful friendships. When you listen to those records, you are hearing the sound of people who are deeply connected working in complete emotional and musical synchronicity. Even though I am not the main force behind the songs for those projects, the albums we make together still express a shared vision. They serve as fantastic chances to be pulled outside of my own box, too. My arrangements on those records are directly inspired by the songwriting and the musical influences that each person and project holds closest.

Weft began as a deeply personal project. When did you start conceiving of this album as its own identity under the name "Weft"? What motivated you to create your own music?

I have always wanted to have my own “solo” project, with me at the helm of the songwriting process- riffs,, arrangements, lyrics, production, etc. I wanted a project that felt like a personal space where I could be curious and experimental and risky with my creative choices. I got the name from reading a book, and honestly, I don't even remember what I was reading! Probably some strange sci fi book. I began writing material for what became “The Splintered Oar” at the very tail end of 2019, with real production and recording beginning sometime in 2020.

We know that the Gulf of Texas was an important starting point for the album's concept. What does that place represent for you, and why did you feel it was the right setting for this kind of sonic story?

The Gulf Coast region of Texas is where I was born and raised. Its climate and its people are woven through me. Above all else, it represents home. The unique ecology of the region - a unique interweaving of savannah, grasslands, and marshes- always gave it a unique and eerie feeling that I had never heard expressed in a musical context, at least the way that I wanted to with this project. The Gulf region's history of hurricanes and floods was also a huge inspiration. The album is thematically centered around the theme of humanity overreaching into a natural world that we still have not conquered. The ocean is the true final frontier, and one that we may never conquer.

The project's name, Weft, alludes to the idea of the "weave" running through a tapestry, and you've explained that it represents the mix of influences and experiences that have shaped you as a musician and as a person. How do you translate that weaving metaphor to the way you construct your songs? Would you say that The Splintered Oar is, in a way, your self-portrait woven with sounds?

That's a great encapsulation! For the writing of the album, I allowed myself to freely implement and blend any sounds and ideas that naturally came to me. I didn't prevent myself from blending in country, prog, latin, and classical influences in with the metal elements of the record's sound. It was one of the most free and unfettered musical experiences I have ever known!

The Splintered Oar presents itself as a kind of constantly mutating sonic "tapestry," with dense atmospheres and acoustic sections that seem to come from a completely different genre. For example, the closing track, Dream of Oaks, is a good example of this, although it's something we see throughout the album. How did you structure the balance between these contrasts without losing narrative cohesion?

Musically, I worked as much on the transition between ideas as I did the riffs, verses, and choruses themselves. I also repeat many motifs through the songs of the album. For example, the entire chord progression that underlies

the opening acoustic passage of "Dream of Oaks" is actually repeated for the outro of the song, starting with the Doom section that comes in around 7 minutes. It's not entirely obvious, because I don't think listeners are trying to find ways to connect the country intro to the funeral doom and black metal outro - but the underlying music is somehow, subconsciously connected for listeners by the shared key and chord charts. This is a trick that Yes uses to great effect on "Close to the Edge" to keep cohesion between the various movements of its 18 minute length.

By the way, the first part of Dream of Oaks has a very evocative character, even reminiscent of great Southern rock classics like Lynyrd Skynyrd's Simple Man, before transforming into something much darker and more extreme, with elements of black, doom, and death metal. Are there specific influences from American rock or roots music that are very present in your musical DNA? To what extent are they a conscious part of your creative process, especially in a subject as changeable and risky as this?

I grew up with a deep love and appreciation for the country and folk music of Texas. Artists like Blaze Foley, Townes Van Zandt, Willie Nelson, Bob Wills, Waylon Jennings, Guy Clark, Dale Watson and Billy Joe Shaver... the list goes on and on and on and on. It's a musical tradition full of personal heroes that I admire and respect as deeply as I do Quorthon or any of the metal artists and bands that inspired my sound. The vocalist on this track is Jordan Day, one of my best friends who I met when living in Austin. He is a gifted musician in his own right, and we collaborated on the lyrics and melodies for his section. He really brought it to life by making it a bit of his own.

What place do Southern rock, country, or even American folk music occupy in your development as a musician? Would you say that those roots still weigh as heavily as your more metal influences?

My main instrument is violin. While I started out learning it as a classical instrument, I began to develop my own intuitions as a player by attending jam sessions, late night rounds, and studying recordings and performances. A lot of that music has a deep grief and sorrow to it that I think is underestimated.. It is as dark as any of the stuff that metal writes about. Maybe even more, because the grief and sorrow aren't as imaginative, or rooted in escapism. The saddest folk songs are raw and unvarnished to the point of discomfort for the artist and the listener.

The Hull is one of the most intense moments on the album, with a combination of elements ranging from atmospheric black metal to nods to progressive rock, like Opeth, and even classics like Pink Floyd (in parts it reminded me of excerpts from The Wall). Without losing that atmospheric black metal edge, while immersing us in dense atmospheres charged with mysticism, ethereal vocals, ritualistic rhythms, and more melodic sections featuring guitars and violins. It's one of the most intense tracks on the album, with a thrilling and epic ending that heightens the tension. What was the process like of shaping a song so layered and full of contrasts? Do you start with a clear idea, or do you let influences and emotions guide the structure?

The Hull is definitely a great encapsulation of what I want to do with this project - as hilarious as it is to release a 10 and a half minute single, that is why we did it! This album really did fall out of me, and came together without too much fighting or reconfiguration. When I listen to that album, it does the best job of any track on the record of painting the picture of what it is like to sit on the beach in Galveston on a rainy day, watching the lights from oil rigs flicker in the distance and the monolithic barges slowly passing in the gloom. Because the vision was so clear for me, I think the song made itself clear to me as well, from the start.

"Red Dawn" is probably the most abrupt and ferocious track on the album, with more aggressive vocals, violins pushed to their limits, and a sense of chaos that contrasts with the more measured construction of the rest of the album. How did this song come about? What role does this track play in the album's emotional journey?

This track directly talks about the storm of 1900, which eviscerated Galveston and changed the course of the Gulf's development forever. It was largely inspired by Erik Larson's book "Isaac's Storm," which is a fantastic read. There is a lot of anger in that song, channeling the frustrations that we all share about the world climate collapsing, and the feeling that we are destroying our only home to the point of no return. I see the Storm of 1900 as a symbolic and natural force of reclamation, where Earth effortlessly reclaimed part of itself from humanity out of self defense.

Although The Splintered Oar is a very personal project, collaborations play a crucial role in its development. Austin Lunn, Andrea Morgan, and Jordan Day each contribute unique nuances, from percussion to vocals and violins, further enriching the album's soundscape. What did each of them bring to the project, both artistically and emotionally?

Austin and I have worked together on several records at this point. The upcoming metal record from Panopticon will be our 4th full length collaboration for his project, in addition to all of the other records we have worked on together. This was a fun opportunity for us to flip the creative roles, and for him to bring his expertise behind the drum kit to my album, which sorely needed him! The energy and frenzy of his performance is indelibly connected to the album's identity in my mind. Andrea Morgan performs a violin duet with me on the first track and lends her

ethereal and beautiful vocals to some of the most subdued and aggressive moments on the record. She is a multifaceted artist, and her work with Exulansis, Aerial Ruin, the Keening, Mortuous, and other projects has always been inspirational for me as a violinist. It was a fantastic opportunity to collaborate with her on this album. Last but certainly not least, Jordan Day contributes the country vocals on "Dream of Oaks." As I discussed before, Jordan really channels a lot of those classic influences of mine, and he is an incredible songwriter in his own right. I wanted to give him a chance to shine so that other people may know his incredible music.

You've worked as a mixing engineer for other artists, but tackling your own album is a different kind of challenge. What was it like shaping and bringing coherence to so many layers of sound on *The Splintered Oar*, knowing that everything was so imbued with personal intention?

In a word, it was difficult. Haha! I struggled to remain objective during the mixing process, for sure. And there was no way in hell I was going to master the thing once it was mixed. I relied heavily on people with better ears than me to help steer the sound of the album. I learned in a trial by fire fashion. There are things about the way I recorded the record that I would definitely do differently on my next record, but it was an exploratory process, just as writing the music itself was. I'm okay with the sound being raw, because it has atmosphere and all of the performances have such strong feeling to them. Preserving that was my main goal for the mixing.

What was it like transitioning from being "the violinist for other bands" to being the absolute creative center of your own project? Is there a kind of vertigo in taking on all that weight?

There is a bit of vertigo, absolutely. It feels like stepping out onto my own trail after walking trails alongside others for so long! It is nerve-wracking, but also freeing and exciting. I felt ready for the album to be out there in the world by the time it was released.

Do you have plans to take *The Splintered Oar* to the stage?

Yes. With all of the players featured on the record and additional friends!

Finally, how would you describe *The Splintered Oar* to someone listening to it for the first time?

It's like listening to *Blood on Ice* if it was wearing a baby cowboy hat. Haha!

Congratulations on *The Splintered Oar*, and thank you for your time.

Thank you for having me, José. It's an honor!