interview by
J. BENNETT

Q&A WITH KERRY KING

SLAYER's guitarist discusses his new band's debut LP, *From Hell I Rise*, and his old band's reunion shows

"I'M **multitasking, approving some band photos** while I'm talking to you." That's Slayer guitarist Kerry King, but the band photos he's talking about aren't for Slayer. They're for his new homonymous solo band, which also features Death Angel vocalist Mark Osegueda, ex-Vio-Lence/Machine Head guitarist Phil Demmel, former Hellyeah bassist Kyle Sanders and Slayer drummer Paul Bostaph. That the band's debut, *From Hell I Rise*, is very Slayer-esque shouldn't surprise anyone. King wrote the majority of Slayer's 2015 swansong, *Repentless*, himself. In fact, two of the songs on *From Hell I Rise* are from those sessions. Plus, you've got two members of Slayer alongside Demmel, who is so steeped in the band's music that he filled in for guitarist Gary Holt for four shows in 2018. ¶ Much more surprising, perhaps: Slayer are coming out of retirement after playing what had previously been billed as their final shows in November of 2019. As of this writing, they're booked for three festivals this fall. "It was the right offer at the right time," King explains. "I think people are assuming Slayer is going to tour again, [or] Slayer is going to record again, and I'm pretty sure that's not going to happen. But the offer for the one-offs came up, and they happened to be around the fifth anniversary of our final tour, so it was intriguing to me." ¶ Beyond that? After living his entire life in Southern California, King recently moved to New York City. "My wife's from here. She escaped a 20-year exile on the West Coast," our man says with a laugh. "I've never really been a city kid, so getting thrust into that lifestyle is different than living in the suburbs in Southern California, but I've been around the world countless times so I can pretty much adjust to anywhere. The thing is, New York is probably the place I've been to the most, but I never really took the time to learn what's what—where's SoHo, where's Chelsea?—so, now I know all the stuff I probably should've learned 30 years ago."

From what I understand, you wanted to release *From Hell I Rise* under a band name rather than your own name. What changed?
Anybody that knows me knows that I'm not a vain person, but I was being pushed to have at least part of my name in the band name. It was gonna be King's Reign for a long time, but there was a trademark issue. I dragged my feet as long as I could because I wanted the coolest name that fit our band. I went so far as to look through a dictionary trying to combine words that hadn't been used. Try that someday—it's fucking tough. But during that time, we came up with the logo that we have now—except now it's two K's—and I love the logo. It blows me away every time I look at it. Then our first shows got announced, so we had to roll with what we had.

The album title is also a song title, but theoretically you could've named the album after any of the songs. Why did you choose that one?
I think it really tells the tale of what's been happening to me since Slayer went away. Maybe you could consider Slayer being my hell or the writing process being my hell, but it's Kerry King coming back. Plus, that's a killer song. It just worked for me all the way around. You could say the same thing about the first song we released, "Idle Hands." Idle hands do the devil's work, so that's what I've been doing for the last four years preparing for my record to come out.

In another interview, you said, "If you've liked any part of Slayer throughout our history, there's something on this record that you can get into." How important was it to keep the Slayer spirit alive on this record?
To be honest, I wasn't really trying to do that. I think it just happened because, as Slayer reached the end of its recording life, I started being responsible for more and more stuff. Like, *Repentless* was 95 percent mine. This record is 100 percent mine, which is just the obvious next step. And I'm not looking to do anything drastically different than before, because I like that music anyway. If I was a fan, this is the music that I'd be into. Lucky for me, I get to make it.

The title track and "Rage" were originally recorded for *Repentless*. Were they the starting point for this record?
I had always planned on including those. I've got four other songs that weren't on *Repentless*. I didn't know how many new ones I would write or how the *Repentless* ones would weigh against the stuff I'd written since our last show. But those two were all done—they had lyrics, they had leads—so we just re-recorded them for this session and I had Phil play the lead that Gary was playing originally. They were as much a starting point as anything.

You wrote all the lyrics. How much of that was done before you brought Mark in?
Quite a bit. He's the only guy who practiced with me and Paul. I began the transformation of Mark months before he even knew he had the gig. When we recorded, it's amazing where he ended up. Some of the registers he sang in, I was like, "You can reproduce this, right? I don't wanna be putting out product where you sing one day and then you're down for the count for five days because you blew your voice out." But the performances he gave are awesome and exciting, and I didn't hear most of them until he went in to do the final tracking.

Yeah, he sounds different than he usually does. It doesn't sound like Slayer with Mark from Death Angel on vocals.
Yeah, I think it's got a freshness to it. Does it remind me of Slayer? Of course it does. I wrote it. Not that Slayer was stale, but this is the next step. It's me and Paul from Slayer, and he and I work so well together that he was my obvious choice. So, the nucleus obviously lends itself to sounding like Slayer, but I think with Mark singing and Kyle playing bass and Phil doing some solos, it just gave it a different flavor.

Do you think this record would've been different if it had been a Slayer record instead of your own?
Probably, because these guys are just happy to be in this band. It's a fresh step for them. When people start saying, "Kerry put another supergroup together," the way I look at it is, I put together a band of guys that didn't have any work. The only one that had work was Mark. The rest of them were looking for a job. Luckily, they were friends of mine, and the timing worked out. Which was good for me, because if this had happened another time, maybe they would've got work elsewhere.

When you put the band together, you started with Paul.
Oh, yeah. Paul was always there. Originally, [▸]

PHOTO BY JIM LOUVAU

← Straight from Hell
Kerry (c) and all the King's men

> **"I think it's got a freshness to it. Does it remind me of Slayer? Of course it does. I wrote it."**

when Tom [Araya] announced to Slayer that he was gonna stop playing, I told the other guys that I had their back. But as time went on, I thought people are already gonna call this band "Baby Slayer" or "Slayer 2.0," so I figured I had to stop taking pieces of Slayer and go in another direction. With me and Paul being from Slayer, that kinda aced Gary out. We never really talked about it, but it's nothing against Holt at all. If I got another chance to play with him other than these one-off Slayer shows, I'd jump at it. He's a good dude.

Did you consider anyone besides Mark for the vocal position?
Well, Mark threw his name in the hat quite early. I knew he was into it, and he's a friend of mine. You gotta do your due diligence and see if anybody else might fit better, but at the end of the day, I'm super happy with this choice.

How did you decide on Phil and Kyle?
Phil came out and did four Slayer shows in 2018 when Holt had to leave the tour to see his dad. At that point, he basically told me, "I wanna be part of your future." That's all it took for me. I never thought Phil was a shabby player, but after he played with us for those four shows, I was like, "Man, this guy's better than I thought he was." What he did for Slayer in that short amount of time I couldn't have done for Priest, which is my favorite band. He learned our set in 48 hours. I couldn't even have attempted that, so I was very impressed by his work ethic.

I had to play my cards with Kyle a little earlier because, as we all know, unfortunately, Vince [Abbott] left us in 2018, so I knew Kyle was out of work. I didn't want to be insensitive, so I sent my respects and said, "If you're looking to continue to work, I've got something for you in 2020." He said something like, "I read you loud and clear." So, we made the connection and he just waited until I got done.

Tell me about "Crucifixation." You've said it's the "money shot" of the album.
I always say that. But there's so much metal in that song, dude! I think it's really reminiscent of '80s thrash. It's got a giant harmonic breakdown in the middle with repetitive drum fills, and I've never been able to write a song like that before to give Paul that opportunity. It's just got so many different strong points and feels and textures. To tell you the truth, the album was supposed to be called *Crucifixation*. In my supreme dumbness, I assumed I made that word up, but I didn't. [*Laughs*] When I finally looked it up, I realized that seven or eight people had done it before me. So, I didn't change the song title, but I changed the album title.

What about "Toxic"? There's a line in there about people forcing their opinions on others.
I wrote that one when I had COVID and I was stuck in a hotel. That was right when *Roe vs. Wade* got shot down, so I was pissed off about that—as most women in the country were. It made me realize that every one of the Supreme Court judges that Trump appointed lied to get the job. These are people deciding your future. These are the people making choices for us. That's some bullshit.

The first Kerry King show is coming up in May. How are you feeling about it? It's been a while since you've been onstage.
Nerves aren't a thing for me because I've done this for so long. But I'm super excited. I'm excited to get onstage with my friends in my new band and rip some faces off some hungry fans.

Will you be playing Slayer songs, or is that off the table now that Slayer is doing reunion shows?
I always planned on doing that. To take more ammunition away from people, I'm gonna focus on the Slayer songs I wrote or had a part in writing. So, I won't be playing "Angel of Death" or "War Ensemble" right away. This is me, so I don't need to take anyone else's stuff to make me better. That being said, I need Slayer songs because I don't have enough material to headline.

What are you looking forward to most about the reunion shows?
I'm looking forward to playing again, for our fans. I'm also really looking forward to the fire. I get everything else for my band, but I can't afford fire. So, Slayer's going to have fire and we're going to burn everything.

Is there any aspect of it that you're dreading?
No. You know, I haven't seen Gary Holt since our last show, and I obviously blame that on the pandemic. I've seen Paul a lot because Paul's in my band. But I don't see my crew. I miss my crew—they're like family to me. And I'm sure most of them will be back. So, that's another high point, not a low point. I don't have any low points.

Are these three festivals it for Slayer, or do you see more shows happening?
They are definitely one-offs. If I book anything else this year, I want it to be my band. Slayer doesn't need a profile. Slayer's got a profile. I think it makes sense for everyone: There's three shows celebrating the fifth year anniversary of what was our final tour.

Ozzy famously announced his retirement with the "No More Tours" tour in 1992 and then continued to tour for another 25 years or so. Is that a situation you'd like to avoid with Slayer?
Without a doubt. We turned offers down for at least three years before we even considered one. The offers are always going to be there, and I'm going to shoot down shit-tons of them. But once this happens, I guarantee you, Europe's going to want one or two. So, we'll have to see how that flies. [dB]

PHOTO BY JIM LOUVAU

NOCTURNUS AD, Unicursal

8

Magus opus | PROFOUND LORE

Nocturnus AD drummer/vocalist Mike Browning's multi-layered Dr. Magus concept finds new chapters in *Unicursal*, the musical and thematic follow-up to 2019's admirable *Paradox*. To that end, the Floridians' regressive/progressive tilt is the hyper-dimensional successor to 1990's landmark *The Key*, but not entirely.

That was the allure of *Paradox*, actually: It was neither nostalgic nor futuristic, but somehow caught in between—"Seizing the Throne," "The Return of the Lost Key" and "The Bandar Sign" were prime. Browning's storytelling reads much like Charles Stross if musically illustrated with the aesthetics of *Event Horizon*. There are, naturally, references to H.P. Lovecraft, too.

Opener, "The Ascension Throne of Osiris," is awash with oblique aggression, swirling keyboards and wicked, sometimes metagalactic solos. Guitarists Belial Koblak and Demian Heftel (both ex-After Death) have settled well into their roles as cosmic noisemakers against Browning's thrashy mash and keyboardist Josh Holdren's Michael Kamen-like haunts. They convincingly ramp down on *Unicursal*'s midder-tempo tracks, "Mesolithic," "Hod, the Stellar Light" and the album's endcap, "Netzach, the Fire of Victory." Here, Nocturnus AD are more than just frenzy, which, in a strange twist of fate, feels like the album Pestilence never released between *Consuming Impulse* and *Testimony of the Ancients*.

The production is quintessential Nocturnus. Jarrett Pritchard, who's done work for Goatwhore and the remaster of Ripping Corpse's classic debut, handles the material with old-world charm. *Unicursal* has the warm fuzziness of a book of unknown provenance found on a shelf in delightful decay, and it's not annoyingly over-loud—the volume tricks on the goopy drip-drop intro to "CephaloGod" made for a surprising jolt. After nearly 40 years, Browning still iterates sidereal fantasies with commendable consistency. **—CHRIS DICK**

mythology of the 1993-formed band's homeland; its title is named after the Ancient Greek daimon of war, who is referenced in Homer's *The Iliad*.

"Teiresias," "Fields of Flegra" and "Centauromachy" make for a raucous opening trifecta, with battle-ready horns beckoning the listener during the album's opening moments, giving way to a turbulent tremolo 'n' blast tandem aided by Porphyrion's coruscating screams. While the latter track's riffs construct regal architecture, the keyboards—a time-tested feature of Greek BM—accentuate the opulence without smothering the arrangement.

This instrumental classiness paired with rabid fervor has made Hellenic extreme metal so intoxicating in the right hands. Some might say that Rotting Christ have pushed the atmospheric elements too far, to the detriment of their extreme roots. However, Kawir, like the more melodic Yoth Iria, strike compositional/stylistic balance with thunderous force. "Achilles & Hector" and "Achilles Funeral" are a testament to such mastered dynamism. From scalding BM surges to towering mid-paced marches, replete with spoken word (courtesy of tenor Ilias Zervas), both tracks act as a microcosm of Kawir's exotic sound. When drawing upon ancient myth and legend, the music needs to be equally theatrical and grandiose while remaining archaic. Kawir intrinsically understand this, and that's why they're still at the top tier of Mediterranean black metal three decades on. **—DEAN BROWN**

KERRY KING

7

From Hell I Rise

REIGNING PHOENIX

KK's Slayer

As promised, on his first solo album Slayer guitarist Kerry King doesn't venture too far afield from what he's been doing for the last 40-plus years: thrashing like a maniac. *From Hell I Rise*, were it an *actual* Slayer album, would be an appropriate follow-up to 2015's *Repentless*, which King also had a heavy hand in creating. Which is sort of this album's strength *and* weakness.

As *Repentless* exposed (not surprisingly), Slayer benefited tremendously from the late Jeff Hanneman's contributions. Minus those, with only King providing riffs and lyrics, what you get is top-quality thrash that's also fairly predictable. (I guarantee you've heard many of these riffs and lyrical themes many times before.) The main difference between *From Hell I Rise* and *Repentless* mostly comes down to Death Angel singer Mark Osegueda's vocals and Phil Demmel's leads. But, hey, Osegueda seems to be doing his best Tom Araya here, and Demmel is, shall we say, not the featured soloist, so it's kind of a wash.

Hellyeah bassist Kyle Sanders and Slayer drummer Paul Bostaph handle the rhythm section, which again plays into the Slayer continuity, because Bostaph has played with Slayer on and off for a couple decades and bass was never really featured (or even audible, really) on most Slayer albums. So, sure, this is a Kerry King solo album, but he could have probably just called it a Slayer album and only maybe Araya would have complained. Maybe not. More importantly, this may well be the closest we're going to get to a new Slayer album in the near future, and in that regard, it satisfies that itch in the same way that *Repentless* did.

I don't know if anyone wanted a Kerry King solo album where he showed his soft, sensitive side, or something, but if he was just going to write another Slayer album, maybe just call a spade a spade. There are moments where King veers from Slayer the script—the punky groove of "Two Fists," for instance—but the tone and approach are pretty consistent throughout, for better or worse. Slayer fans, rejoice. **—ADEM TEPEDELEN**

MALPHAS

8

Portal

M-THEORY AUDIO

Following the reaper

Philadelphia quartet Malphas have been crafting blackened melodeath since 2012. Their first demo was a dark gateway into the band's conceptual narrative following the misadventures of their namesake, a demon commanding hell's soldier hordes. Most of those demo tracks were later released on their debut EP, *The Conjuring*. Since then, the band has polished their attack as Pennsylvanian acolytes to Children of Bodom.

Chronologically, new album *Portal* takes place 200 years before the hellborne uprising described

PHOTO BY TIM HUBBARD