

Every now and then you stumble unawares upon a virtually unknown band whose awesomeness hits you in the face like a (fat) raven in flight. Beyond the immediate reward, you just need to poke at the reasons that have so far kept a lid of secrecy on such great and inspiring music. Listening to Von Nebel umschlungen two or three times was enough for me to grab the nearest quill and send a heated epistle to Wintergrimm and Angria der Grausame of Berlin-based Drengskapur, one of such unlikely encounters...



By Bertrand

**Hails!** I guess you will not be offended if I talk of Drengskapur as an emerging name on the extreme metal radar, even if you've been active since 2002. From your point of view, what are the obstacles that stood between the band and a faster rise to attention? Trouble with labels? Bad luck? Low productivity? Something else?

**Wintergrimm:** Hails Bertrand! Well, probably because we did not strive for wider recognition in the first place. Our first release, the Begrabene Tugenden demo in 2003, was limited to just 30 copies. Likewise, our first album Geist der Wälder (2006) came out in only 70 copies. It is only with our second album, released in 2009, that we made our music available to a wider circle. The self-produced CD version is limited to 500 copies and the MC version to 300, issued by the Spanish label Nigra Mors. In retrospect, our early releases were certainly much too limited.

All our releases were self-financed with the exception of the MC version. Therefore, we have had little experience with labels so far (which means little problems). Nigra Mors from Spain was a lucky strike for us indeed. Here are two devoted, honest guys, who really appreciate our music. However, we had a slightly negative experience already... Our new recordings should have been released as a split LP on a German label. We had their oral agreement, and six months later they withdrew their offer, on the grounds that they had some other contractual commitments or whatever. So labels who are interested in releasing our new stuff as a split LP or a 10" EP are welcome to get in touch with us.

**Angria der Grausame:** Another, really important reason is that it is not in our intentions to be well-known at all. Our focus is ourselves and the realization of our ideal of black metal, and the related accomplishments... We are neither the servants of some predetermined or narrow ideology, nor do we give a damn about a second-rate Internet existence (fuck off myspace!!!). This stuff is purely entertainment and time-killing, it has absolutely nothing to do with our music!

**If I'm not mistaken the band now operates as a duo. Is this the right configuration for you (if so why do you think so?), or are you actively looking to build a full line-up? Could you introduce the current members, their musical backgrounds and participations in other bands, if any? Have you been friends for a long time or have you teamed up for the purpose of the band?**

**Wintergrimm:** You are right. Drengskapur consists of two persons: Angria der Grausame on drums and me, Wintergrimm, on guitars and vocals. At the moment, Drengskapur is my only band. Musically speaking, I am into black metal, but I also listen often to thrash, pagan metal, folk and old blues. Angria der Grausame and I knew each other only peripherally before we joined in Drengskapur. When the former drummer left the band, Angria der Grausame filled in on the spot. We've been making music together since 2003 and we are now united by a true friendship.

We are leaving the line-up as such for a reason. It is important that each one of us be able to transpose what he links with Drengskapur and with the music. This freedom would be of course limited with the addition of new musicians, because everyone wants to see his own ideas reflected in the music. Therefore, we can better transpose our musical ideas and preferences as a twosome. We don't have to strike too many compromises, and I think that shows in the music. On this account,

we are not looking for other members.

**Where does the name Drengskapur originate from and what does it mean (beyond being a cool-sounding name)?**

**Wintergrimm:** The concept of "Drengskapur" originates from the Icelandic and means as much as honesty and courage. It describes a certain level of human behaviour. If a man acts in accordance with its values, he deserves to earn the status of "Drengskapur." The nine values contained in that codex can be interpreted from the Eddic poem of the Havamal. The typical ideal of revenge of the German warrior ethics is replaced by the "Drengskapur" ethics, where one faces an enemy without hate or hostility, and tries to see him as a man and, as far as he is worth it, to treat him as such.

The meaning of that name is very important to us, since it carries the key to the necessary adaptation of the old Nordic and German ways of thinking to the modern world. Nowadays, no one achieves anything through means of pure hatred and violence. Level-headedness and spiritual strength matter much more in contemporary societies. Therefore, what we seek to do is unite the old values and the requirements of the modern world. To that effect, reversion to nature and proximity with nature play a major part, which is elementary for us as the alien Drengskapur. Consideration for nature is unfortunately alien to many parts of the world these days.

Just consider the plain worship of the past, which has currency especially in the pagan metal scene. I can't understand people who just crave to live in the past and regret the days of the Vikings or the old German tribes... It is all too unrealistic to me. I think it is important to keep a close eye on one's present environment, in order to exert some influence on it.

**What are the general themes on your latest record?**

**Wintergrimm:** Basically, all texts deal with nature in a way or another. In that respect, our own relationship with nature lies level with the mysticism of nature itself. My view of this is that we live under the aegis of nature, always depending on it and its forces. It's a matter of giving and taking. If the "taking" outweighs the "giving", the balance in which we found ourselves comes apart at the seams.

The first song on the Von Nebel umschlungen album tells of a small vale in the German area of Thuringia. It is an hymn to this vale and its small brook, which have remained seemingly untouched by man, and thus possess a particular magic and attractiveness. In this context it must be said that both our families have Thuringian roots, so that we have strong connections with this place.

The above-mentioned aspect of nature harmony is also being thematized in the course of the album. It's about the cycle of life, extinction and genesis relevant to the end of the world in the Nordic mythology. The key message of these three notions is that a world brought out of balance only can find its balance again through major changes, leaving rubble and ashes in its wake before a new world begins. Connected to life in harmony with the natural elements, this means that in the case of lacking balance, a similar scenario is to be expected, characterized by scarring natural phenomenon.

The last song is about the primordial elementary power, which is inexhaustible and will always define the course of the world.

Besides, what is your degree of immersion in those themes? Let me try to make my question clear: are your songs written from the point of view of an external guy staring in rapture at those things that are fascinating in the pagan aesthetics, or are they a medium through which you picture yourselves in the midst of those dark, ancient surroundings? In other words, is a certain amount of fantasy or even illusion necessary to capture the feel that will produce the best musical sceneries and melodies?

**Wintergrimm:** The lyrics of Drengskapur are fairly realistic, in my view. Of course, there is the occasional metaphor or formulation to be found, but the core of the texts is very close to reality. Let me put it this way: that which I see, hear and feel has an effect on me. Subsequently, my feelings and thoughts become the cement of the lyrics. As I said, the texts are related to nature, so that it is important for us to be in the right environment in order to write. But there is no illusion or anything of the kind involved. The basic feeling of each text flows into the musical commitment, in the form of harmony, melody and rhythm. This process is very instinctive and based on the underlying mood of the lyrics.

**What I found especially noteworthy upon listening to Von Nebel umschlungen is how tight and focused the execution is. For albums in the style, I am used to accepting (and even enjoying) a margin of approximation, but the technical degree you have achieved is almost part of the atmosphere in itself, and certainly allows for great concentration on the melodies. Is the technical aspect something that requires a lot of attention for you?**

**Wintergrimm:** Yes, we do take care to proscribe playing mistakes wherever possible. The reason is of course that during the recording, music is put to a medium, and then cannot be altered and will remain in this form forever. Therefore, we try to focus on a clean technical execution. In addition, we try to achieve atmospheres through melody and rhythm, without resorting to extra instruments. Should the execution of the music be lacking, then the melodies would lose their power and the atmospheres would not unfold. In my opinion, some of the musical enjoyment is lost when obvious mistakes are to be heard. We would like to avoid that, of course. As regards the song structures, I agree that the composition is quite dense. We try to endow each riff with a tension that will push the song forward and mesmerize us. Obviously, it is imperative to deliver the melodies thoroughly. I believe that this is typical of the style of music we play. There are only a few passages where you can catch your breath.

**I'm curious about how long it takes you to develop and finalize a typical, let's say 10'00+ song. Are you in the habit of altering songs a lot as the writing process goes?**

**Wintergrimm:** I usually have the harmonies and raw melodic progression in mind when we start writing a new song. Then we work together on matching the harmonies and seminal melodies with the right tempo. Then I usually refine the melodies some more. Reworking the melodies downstream might be a bit unusual, but at the end of the day we write music in a pretty linear fashion and we don't change much afterwards.

**Most of your songs exceed the 7'00 mark. How did you realize that you needed those lengthier formats for your songs? Do you**



think that your style and musical ethos is (and will remain) opposed to producing shorter, more "radio-friendly" things?

**Wintergrimm:** When composing, we have never thought about the length of the resulting songs, except for the tracks we did for the planned split LP or 10" EP. We simply feel when a song is finished. In most cases, they end up being rather long. I believe that shorter songs would not suit Drengskapur that well. As already mentioned, our music is very atmospheric, and this atmosphere thrives with more extensive songs in my view. You can hear that with bands like Forgotten Woods or Agalloch for instance. Moreover, we want our melodies to grow and build up an impact. The "hypnotic" character of certain melodies sometimes shows only after repeated hearing. Plus, our songs are not built according to a verse/chorus scheme, which makes their structure more complex and automatically leads to longer parts. Our songs are certainly not "radio-friendly", like you say, they have too much depth and intensity for that.

**Angria der Grausame:** An interesting point. In the past, some people did advise us to slash our songs some, as they were allegedly not listener-friendly enough. That is nonsense. We might as well divide each song in three chapters or something, where would be the difference? Either you like the music, or you don't!

Has your vision of the world we live in changed since you are actively making music? Has the music and whatever powers it unleashes in your mind been of any help better grasping the ins and outs of your regular life? Do you have examples?

**Wintergrimm:** For me, the music represents sort of an antithesis of daily life. From the music I draw the strength I need for activities in other domains. That is a key philosophy of Drengskapur... poignant, powerful black metal against all forms of life denial, which are often celebrated by so-called "suicidal" black metal artists. My advice to them: grow up or draw the consequence! There might be other ways to construe those things, but it is my own that counts for me, and that defines my relationship to music. Unlike many other bands, our music simply does not deal with values of decline. Writing music and lyrics has led me to achieve a better grasp of myself. I can see that very clearly as far as the texts are concerned. In my view, creation helps one become aware of one's own principles, which in turns define one's way of acting.

**Angria der Grausame:** It is also a question of spirituality... The magic that surrounds us... Our music often helps me free myself from all the unpleasant aspects of humankind. Music, especially Drengskapur, is for me like a weapon allowing me to create my own, occult and spiritual world. I feel free and independent... Sounds like an empty phrase, but my chains and cage are broken by my music. Metal die-hard forever, haha!

You are based in Berlin, right? Correct me if I'm wrong, but I have the feeling that Berlin is far from being the number one black metal nucleus in Germany. From what I could observe, the scenes in Saxony/Thuringia, Bavaria or the Ruhr area seem more lively in terms of bands, concerts, etc. Is there an actual pattern regarding the distribution of the black metal "population" across Germany? It seems obvious to think that black metal is more likely to thrive in areas close to vast expanses of nature and/or with a strong historical heritage. Is there some validity to the thought, as far as Germany is concerned?

**Wintergrimm:** That's right, we are from Berlin, which is definitely not the capital of the black metal scene. The scenes in Saxony, Thuringia and the Ruhr are indeed more attractive, have more bands and more concerts to offer. However, I cannot say to what extent it has to do with the historical heritage or nature in the respective regions. I think it depends strongly on the philosophical perspective of the individual bands. In black metal, the above-mentioned themes play a secondary role in

my opinion, compared to their importance in the field of pagan metal. Here I would cite Thuringia as an example, for there the history of the area as well as the natural element are very much felt in the music of several local bands, such as Surturs Lohe, Menhir, Odroerir, Helritt and XIV Dark Centuries.

As a whole, the expansion of a regional scene hinges mainly on the protagonists of the active bands there. If those guys have a big influence and are able to arouse young metalheads, that will lead eventually to more activity, which results in a greater number of new bands.

**Angria der Grausame:** Berlin is the right place to isolate oneself from the trendy youngster metalheads, haha!

Is the black metal scene in Berlin in a way "suffering", in terms of support, community involvement, infrastructures, etc., from the city's cosmopolitanism, and thus the wide range of musical cultures and subcultures coexisting there?

**Wintergrimm:** The situation of the black metal scene in Berlin is difficult, because the Berlin fans have really high expectations at concerts. On one hand this is good, of course, especially since in the past couple of years too much music was released and came to attention (through Myspace essentially), which certainly no label would have even produced years ago. But on the other hand it is becoming hard for organizers to stage small concerts in addition to the big tours. And as a consequence, I feel that the audience tends to forget the value-for-money factor. Seeing great bands on one-off bills is more expensive, period. People just expect too much for the money they are willing to pay.

These days, there are only a handful of exclusive black metal concerts in Berlin. We get mostly the regular touring bills. Smaller shows with lesser known underground bands, like there were a few years ago, seldom happen anymore. On top of that, two of the clubs that used to organize such shows had to close their doors. Metal clubs in Berlin are going through hard times, generally speaking. The areas where most of the venues are located are being rehabilitated and the rents are shooting up, leading the original inhabitants to move out and new people to move in, most of whom are not native Berliners and are intolerant towards a little noise at night. I have the feeling that more and more clubs are moving to the outskirts. That is a negative impact of Berlin's attractiveness as the capital of Germany for the metal scene. You are right in saying that Berlin hosts many cultures, but I don't reckon that there is truly a negative impact of other musical styles on black metal in Berlin.

From the outside, Germans give this impression of being a rather conservative people when it comes to metal. I mean, in

what other country could one see bands like Saxon or Whitesnake headlining big summer festivals? Something similar could be said of your black metal scene: most great German bands I know stick to a traditional, "organic" take on pagan/black metal when the scenes in Scandinavia, France or the USA for example have long branched out into more avant-garde approaches. No harm in that of course, but I'm curious about your opinion on that fact. Is that in the German gene pool to be especially protectionist against new trends in metal?

**Wintergrimm:** To be honest, I have never considered the situation under that angle. But you are right in saying that the density of classical black metal bands in Germany is high. Unfortunately, there is also a lot of music around that would have been unfit for a release a few years ago, both in sound and playing quality.

Yes, Scandinavia is by now renowned for bringing a lot of

progressive stuff into black metal. I don't know much about the music in France and the United States though. But there are also some new currents in Germany, which kind of take their distance from traditional black metal and open up to other genres. Maybe we Germans need a little more time. In my opinion, such evolution away from the black metal roots has to do with some musicians thinking that the old stuff is fresh out of ideas. We will see if German black metal also becomes more "modern"...

Apropos concerts, I feel that Germany hosts an above-average amount of shows and festivals in the field of traditional black metal. As a rule, festivals are rather broken up into genres (black, pagan, old-school etc.).

I saw you have embarked on a mini-tour in Spain and Portugal last year. How did it come to this adventure? Was that generally a successful tour and a meaningful experience for you? How does the Latino audience differ from what you are used to in Germany?



Angria der Grausame

**Wintergrimm:** Yes, in March 2009 we were in Spain and Portugal for a few dates. Things shaped up after we played this festival in June 2008, in Germany, together with a Spanish band called Xerión. After our set, their bassist/singer Nocturno came up to us, saying that he liked our music, and we agreed to stay in touch. Three days later, he got back to us and made us an offer for a tape release and a few concerts in Spain. At first we were of course a bit sceptical, as a lot of people talk much and do little. But after exchanging a couple of e-mails, I realized that Nocturno was a

trustworthy guy who meant what he said. So we trusted each other and made concrete plans for the concerts in Spain. Shortly before the mini-tour, he released our album *Von Nebel umschlungen* as a really beautiful MC (limited to 300 copies and featuring a cover of "From hateful visions" by Judas Iscariot) through his label *Nigra Mors*. He took care of everything from concerts to accommodation, rides and stuff, and spared himself no effort. We were able to sleep at his place, he drove us personally to all the locations and acted as a manager for us there. He was an invaluable help, without whom none of those concerts would have happened. We are eternally grateful to him for that, as well as for the general support he and Daga of Xerión showed us! Those days were so far the greatest experience we had as a band, and also on a personal level. Nocturno and Daga: thanks a million!

The tour was a complete success for us. There was a great atmosphere at all the shows and we felt that the Spanish and Portuguese metalheads were really interested in our music. In addition, it was very interesting to get to know the local black metal culture and scene. We had the impression that concerts there are even more underground than in Germany, which was all the more exciting for us. The crowds were slightly smaller than what we are used to in Germany, the clubs also smaller for the most part, but the atmosphere was better, people more enthusiastic. The concerts were therefore more intensive, all in all I found the experience more pure and primordial. The financial aspect there plays a minor role as opposed to black metal shows in Germany, that is probably another reason.

**Angria der Grausame:** Hall and morbido saludos cabrones to our comrades from Galizia and Lusitania!

How do you picture the ideal swan song for Drengskapur? A brutal apotheosis and then blackness, or a carefully thought-out departure when you feel all has been said and done?

**Wintergrimm:** I think that the second option would suit the themes and mentality of Drengskapur better. To end one's life in harmony with the elemental forces is to achieve a "balance." That means an accomplished body of work, which enters eternity in harmony.

Thanks a lot for the interview and for supporting Drengskapur!

Official Website: [www.drengskapur.de/ru](http://www.drengskapur.de/ru)