

EUROPE'S CHAOTIC SCREAMS

Swedish metal band Meshuggah combines 12 years of detail and dissonance that erupts on their latest album *Chaosphere*

By Brian Ferry
A&E Writer

Certain bands in the music industry stand heads above the rest. The Swedish metal band Meshuggah is one of these bands. Meshuggah has been touring the United States and Canada with Slayer and Sick Of It All since the middle of March. During this time, they have been subjecting many Americans to an unfamiliar type of metal.

Meshuggah writes a complex, multi-directional type of metal that is unlike that of any other band. Many people who hear Meshuggah for the first time are confused by their sound. Musicians who listen to them for the first time say that the band plays their music in a fast time signature, fitting more notes into four beats than normal, similar to the way jazz musicians do. The band claims that their music usually skips a beat at alternating times to give the impression that they are playing at strange time signatures.



Meshuggah bassist Gustaf Hielm.

Photo by Brian Ferry

Regardless of their time signature, Meshuggah plays a type of metal that is both fast and slow, groovy and straightforward, and at a constant stop-and-go pace. On their latest album, "*Chaosphere*," which was released in November of 1998, the band goes for an intense, chaotic sound that is tougher than any of their previous albums.

"We didn't actually have the time to make all of the dynamics that we usually have on our albums," said vocalist Jens Kidman. "We just wanted to make a hard, crushing album." And that they did.

Meshuggah got their start in 1987 and released a debut EP called "*Psykisk Testbild*," in 1989. Kidman and lead guitarist Fredrik Thordendal grew up on the same street in Umea, Sweden. They picked up drummer Tomas Haake in 1990 when their older drummer left the band.

"I dropped the guitar just to concentrate on the vocals," says Kidman.

In order for him to do that, Meshuggah had to find another guitarist. So Haake asked Marten Hagstrom, a guitarist and old band mate, to join them. With the addition of Peter Nordin on bass, Meshuggah got signed to the international metal label Nuclear Blast where they released "*Contradictions Collapse*" in 1991, "*None*" in 1994 and "*Selfcaged*" in 1995. Thordendal and Hagstrom are the main writers of Meshuggah's music, while Haake writes the majority of the lyrics.

1995 also saw the release of Meshuggah's most well known and popular release, called "*Destroy, Erase, Improve*." The band went on tour in Europe afterward, but Nordin fell ill and could not finish the remaining shows.

"I read about it in the newspaper, and I phoned him and asked if he wanted a stand-in bass player," said current bassist Gustaf Hielm. Meshuggah instead decided to finish off the remainder of the tour with only four members. At some shows, they played with both guitarists, and at others, Thordendal played bass.

"But it wasn't until the fall of '95 that I actually got to play with them," Hielm recalls. Thordendal called him back just before embarking on a second small tour of

Europe that same year.

"I got a phone call from Fredrik about one week before the tour got started," said Hielm.

Despite all of their releases and their record deal with Nuclear Blast, Meshuggah never came to tour for "*Destroy, Erase, Improve*" in America.

"It was just in the last two years that they got the proper office here," says Hielm. He went on to say that the German offices that they were a part of focused mainly on the European market.

But Meshuggah did come to the United States for the Milwaukee Metal Fest in the summer of 1998. After, they played three additional shows along the East Coast and received a great response.

"I think the American crowds were better than the European, for us," said Kidman.

Meshuggah will finish their current North American tour on May 1 in Phoenix, Arizona. After this, Meshuggah will play the Dynamo festival in Holland. They are also hoping to join the reunion tour of the band S.O.D. (Stormtroopers Of Death) through Europe after playing at Dynamo.



Photo by Brian Ferry

Jens Kidman at Roseland Ballroom, NYC.

Tom Petty performs three intimate shows in NYC

By Beth Motschenbacher
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On April 15, I trekked down to New York to see Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers. The show was the last of their three-night stand at Irving plaza, a small intimate venue that fit about 1,000 fans. The series of shows, along with several at the Fillmore West in San Francisco last month, served as warm-up to the full-scale tour planned for the summer. The heartbreakers will be touring in support of their new album, "*Echo*," which was released on April 13.

I arrived at 6:30 P.M. and there was a line wrapped around the block. Once inside, I waited two hours for the opening act. The Blind Boys of Alabama, who weren't even mentioned on the bill, to start their set, Tom Petty himself came out to introduce The Blind Boys. They Blind Boys of Alabama are a blues-gospel oriented sextet that have been together and recording since 1937. They were all decked out in matching black suits and bright orange satin shirts. Two of them, who were actually blind and about 90-years-old, were escorted by their band mates on and off the stage, where they circulated through the crowd. At first, the audience seemed listless, and was simply anxious to hear Petty. But with each song, the Blind

Boys played longer and better. By the end of their 45-minute set, they had everyone clapping and cheering along.

Tom Petty and the heartbreakers came on stage at 10:15. They opened with raucous renditions of "Around and Around," and "Jammin' me," which got the crowd all hyped up. From then on, it was pure "Greatest Hits" material. They did "Runnin' Down a Dream," and "Breakdown" which was absolutely incredible. Mike Cambell, the heartbreaker's lead guitar player, fingered a flawless solo.

Tom exchanged pleasantries with the crowd, talking about how great it had been to be in New York all week and assuring everyone that the band had a lot more to play. They surprised everyone with several well-done covers, including J.J. Cale's "Call Me the Breeze," and Buffalo Springfield's "For What it's Worth." For the next number, Petty asked the crowd to help him out with the words to a song from the "good old seventies," in case he forgot. And although Petty didn't need help with the words, the whole audience was singing along for the crowd-pleasing "Don't Do ME Like That."

Next came "Mary Jane's Last Dance," and the anti-authority anthem, "I Won't Back Down," for which Petty strapped on his acoustic guitar, taking a break from the

raw intensity of the rest of the songs. Cambell, along with Howie Epstein on bass, Benmont Tench on piano, and Brian Ferrone on drums were all clearly enjoying themselves. Petty just grinned through the whole show. The next section of songs was comprised of "You Don't Know How It Feels," and "It's Good To BE King," from Petty's 1994 solo album, "*Wildflowers*."

The three-hour set began to draw to a close when the band threw out another old favorite, "Even the Losers." They then went into the second single released from "*Echo*," "Room at the Top," followed up with another new song, "I Don't Wanna Fight." After a brief trip backstage, Petty and the heartbreakers returned for an encore, which was "You Wreck Me," "Free Fallin'," and a new song, "Free Girl Now," which already sounds like a classic.

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