Soufferance Interview for Abridged Pause Blog

Editor's Note: This interview was submitted by long-time fan, supporter and friend, Joanna Marinova in 2013. The answers were completed in February 2014 and is now published on the Abridged Pause Blog.

Alexandre Julien pictured during the Soufferance film noir photoshoot.

-Hello Alex! Let me introduce the readers in this interview as we will emphasize on the emotional part of Soufferance. I am very excited to recover my first memories about Soufferance since I was deeply plunged in the atmosphere of the first album which I've heard (it was "Travels Into Several Remote Nations of the Mind"). And want to mention that I found it totally by chance for what I am lucky! So my first question is… Do you think that sadness, distress, tragedy, all this painful emotions are always that kick in the ass which unlock

your hidden gifts and turn you into a direction to create art, music, poetry, etc? Because Soufferance is mostly based on these dark emotions and the thoughts they're conceiving. And if not what brings the spark for this project?

Thanks for the interview opportunity Joanna! I don't want to sound like an asshole in the first paragraph, but I have to say that the best music is always created from sadness and distress, not from happiness. Anyone who will tell you that they can make "love happy" songs is a fake artist and they really don't know their innerself. Often those people will be the same ones who focus on the statistics and charting of their music, those artists who are in it for the fame and money, not for the principle of being an "artist", as one who creates, because he has to and its the best thing he can really do while staying true to himself. The good stuff comes from starvation, not only in the stomach but also in the appetite for love. And those who have been truly obsessed with love will know that this type of "love" is not a restful state and your stomach turns in and out with knots every moment you're not with the person and each argument you have with this precious love makes you want to tear your guts out from the pain it creates for you. In this sense, true love brings both the ultimate happiness when the other person is present and the most self-loathing depression when you're alone. To me that's as close as it gets to making "love songs". When that party departs for the last time and you're left with nothing but hatred for yourself, that's when the real stuff comes out.

-I won't miss to mention the whole unique vision of your albums. Actually some parts of them are handmade by you. This is so intimate. They are like tiny boxes of memories, they bring so much emotion. What is your personal message to each fan who has already obtained an album of Soufferance.

I really like this question. As most independent bands and artists know, sometimes we have to resolve to handmaking a

lot of our merchandise. But in the last few years it seems to have taken a turn for what the fans want most. They really feel like they get a piece of the musician's soul when they get one. And that's partly true. Not so much in music as it is with painters per say, which makes me glad that I'm not a visual artist. I'm very sensitive to the art that I create and I could never allow myself to sell an "only copy" of a painting. To me that's taking too big a part of my soul away. Luckily, in my case, I have no graphic talent.

But the handmade box you're referring to is the "Travels" boxset that I released in the summer of 2013. There's many reasons why I made the boxset. First of all, each of the three releases that are included as part of the Travels phase were released at completely different times, even though they were all recorded during the same period. One was released in November of 2007, another in August of 2009 and the last in July of 2010. By the time that each new one was coming out, the previous one was out of print, so the new fans couldn't get their hands on the full concept and were left only having one or two out of the three releases. By 2013, those three releases were all out of print and all three labels that released them don't exist anymore. I went through my music trunk (I have a left-over black trunk from my military days where I put all my music related stuff) and found some copies of those albums. I also went through great lengths to trace the guys who ran those record labels and get them to also go through their archives and purchased from them whatever left over copies they could find. Between those three releases and bonus material, I was only able to get twenty of them to have the exact same content, which is why it's limited to only twenty copies. To box it up I went to three different arts & crafts stores to find all the material I needed and hand painted and glued and stamped the twenty boxes that housed the material. It was really amazing to make, both fun and giving a pride of accomplishment. I

plan to make another similar boxset for the “Tristesse” concept, hopefully in the spring or summer of 2014.

What I could say for those who have any of the Soufferance releases is thank you. Thank you for liking my music enough to actually buy it. I never made music for anyone but myself, so it’s always a surprise when someone else likes it. It wasn’t meant to appeal to anyone else but me, so thank you for being messed up enough to enjoy it!

-Your latest release “Travels” is a compilation of three albums – “Forthcoming Travels”, its 2009 reissue and the album “Travels Into Several Remote Nations of the Mind” . It unites the whole Soufferance’s conception of traveling. What is mind-travelling for you? What can “cause“ you such type of travelling?

I’m not sure how to answer this question. I don’t take any drugs, and I drink solely as a pleasure to enjoy spirits, not to get drunk. So it’s in no way an out-of-mind expression, just to get that idea out of the way. The “Travels” concept was really based on literature. When I was in elementary school, I was always reading all the classics. Jules Verne has always been one of my favorite author, and he certainly made my mind wander when I was a child. Jonathan Swift also had a huge impact on me when I read Gulliver’s Travels, I was in first grade! The full title of that book was “Travels Into Several Remote Nations of the World, In Four Parts. By Lemuel Gulliver, First a Surgeon, and then a Captain of Several Ships”. Thus comes the influence for the concept. The Soufferance album was named “Travels Into Several Remote Nations of the Mind” and the single, long track on the album was titled “The Thoughts and Memoirs of Mike Lachaire, First a Strange Individual and then a Philosopher”. So the whole concept was titled after Gulliver’s Travels. If anything it’s more a dedication to authors who have influenced my childhood and have helped me grow up to be an adventurous man.

-Are “Bonjour Tristesse” and “Adieu Tristesse” conceptual albums? If so what is the relation between them?

Soufferance is always about concepts. I’m concept-obsessed I think… The “Tristesse” phase is actually the second official phase for Soufferance. Technically speaking it should be the third phase, if I count the demo days. It would be: Demo Phase (September 2006-January 2007), Travels Phase (January 2007-June 2009), Tristesse Phase (October 2009-February 2011), City Phase (August 2011-Now). Those phases represent the periods when the material was written, and as you can determine by looking up the release dates, have little to do with “when” they got released to the public. Too often do record labels delay the releases.

The concept in the “Tristesse” phase, which includes the “Bonjour Tristesse” EP and the “Adieu Tristesse” LP were written with three main influences. First and foremost, mental instabilities, as I suffered from clinical depression through out most of my life. The “Bonjour Tristesse” EP is based mostly on that idea, and itself has three movements. The first refers back to my clinical state, and the second and third to what could have possibly happened if I didn’t “snap out of it”; giving up and going completely insane. The concept for the album “Adieu Tristesse” takes that into consideration but the story picks up where I am saved at the end and brought out of my depression and into a phase of love. The album was hugely influenced by Swans. I was listening to them a lot when I was recording that album, particularly their album “Soundtrack for the Blind”. Swans and Faith No More are probably my biggest influences musically.

-What is your strategy for the presentation of Soufferance to the public. I see that nowadays literally everyone can record an album in home conditions with really good, professional quality and can promote it on the web most commonly and get its fans of course. But in one moment every artist, musician,

want to see his “baby” on stage. What is your exact vision of Souffrance’s live performance?

Okay this is a two-parter. I am aware that music has changed drastically in the turn of the century and even I record everything at home, Mortified Studios. My presentation to the public can really be summed up by this: “Soufferance is MY story”. I mean it is “my” life that is being written about and transcribed. I think that’s elemental to deep, introspective music. Too many people lie to themselves and try to convince themselves that music has to be something or another, in order to please the public. Once again, I don’t agree with them and find no value in their artistic vision. There are also the opposite, those musicians (I could name names but I’m going to be nice and leave them out, they know exactly who they are) who release an average of two albums per month! That’s twenty-five albums a year, practically, and those “musicians” just record anything that their guitar or sampler omits, put a lot of reverb and delay on it to make it stretch to ten minutes, give it a quick “Name+Part 1” and get these micro labels to release it on tape, cd-r and digital. Those bands have twenty-five albums coming out every year, on three different format each, that’s seventy-five releases to their name, every year. How can you take those people seriously?

On my end, I record a great deal of stuff, but very little of it gets released. As well, I have my own record label, Abridged Pause Recordings, and my own publishing company, Abridged Pause Publishing, that hold all the rights and releases for my music. I decided some time ago that since I was making music for myself, first and foremost, that I would release it myself as well. Sometimes it’s digital, sometimes I do a limited pressing. Usually I keep the pressings for compilations or discographies, where people are more likely to want to invest in a full concept.

The second part, which concerns playing live. I honestly

don’t foresee Soufferance every playing live. There are so many layers and effects in the songs that it’s not realistic to expect it to come off live. I could find musicians to help me, but then it would cancel the idea of it being “MY story”. Then I could use those programs that let you build layers and play them live as background to me playing the lead guitars, but that’s unethical in my opinion and I’m not a DJ, I’m a musician. Soufferance is a studio band only. I’m very open to talking about it and answer all types of questions but playing live is not a future I foresee happening.

-Tell me more about those amazing psycho videos of Soufferance. Whose was the idea, who is involved? Are you preparing a new one and on which track?

I have an obsession with film noir. The “Tristesse” phase was originally going to be completely based on film noirs, but that was put off for the “City” phase. In all, I created four music videos for Soufferance. The first one was for a preview of “Adieu Tristesse“, which is a mix of two songs, “Alternating Perfection” and “Absence as Fonder Hearts”. This video was put together from footage of a 1962 Frank Perry film “David and Lisa”. Then I made a full-length music video (fourteen minutes) for the song on “Bonjour Tristesse”, “Dementia Præcox“. This video was edited from footage of John Frankenheimer’s 1966 film “Seconds”. The third video I created was for “A Nightmare Ends”, which was edited from Edward Dmytryk’s 1944 “Murder, My Sweet”, but this video was lost. Finally I created one for “A Memory of Past Emotions” from the Anthony Mann 1944 movie “He Walked By Night”. Each of those four videos were made from movie footage that I felt could give off quite a bit of reaction from a viewer, even if the emotions are not the same as when listening to the music on its own.

I have been planning to edit the first original footage Soufferance music video since the fall of 2011. In December

of 2011 my best friend and I did a full photoshoot as well as filming some video for a film noir short film intended for a song on the (yet-unreleased) Soufferance album “Memories of a City”. The song is called “The Asphalt Jungle”, it’s over twelve minutes long. Some of the footage was lost in 2012 by a computer crash, and additional filming would certainly be required, but some day I’ll get around to editing it together.

-What’s most delightful pleasure for you while you’re creating music?

That’s hard to answer too. I usually have two reactions when writing music. After recording, it’s either that I feel completely satisfied, or I’m impartial, or not sure that I like it anymore. In this second case, I wait a couple of days and listen to it again. Most of the time I’ll like it again and it’s going to be kept. The creating part is not usually delightful. I’m usually depressed and having trouble with my recordings, because they never come out the way I want them to. The real pleasure and pride for me comes when the album is getting put together. Seeing the artwork is probably the thing that excites me the most when an album gets made. For me that’s the beginning of the end product. The relief that the hard work is almost done for me and I actually get to “see” something that represent the music.

-Tell me more about your label Abridged Pause Recordings. When was it founded, what are its purposes for the near future?

Abridged Pause Recordings started in 2008 and I wanted to release other people’s music exclusively. I put out four releases by other bands before limiting it to only my music and music of very close friends. I’m very picky about who I chose to invest in. Bands nowadays think that they can record twenty-five albums a year of the same boring drone music and get some independent label to invest money into it. If I’m going to invest my hard-earned money, it has to

be in a band I really believe in. That’s why I mostly release my own music now. I’ve released my projects Soufferance and Vision Éternel and I plan to release material from my latest band Citadel Swamp sometime in 2014. Bands of close friends that I hope to work with include Eliminator, Brainscan, or anything by Eiman Nejad. Valleys of the Living or anything by Howard Change. Black Autumn, Black Sand and Starless Nights or Beyond the Dune Sea would be nice as well.

-If Soufferance is a deep mind traveling what is your final destination?

Death, in some form or another. But I don’t believe in an afterlife.

-To conclude with – what are your plans for Soufferance? Thank you for this interview Alex. It was a pleasure!

I think most of them have been mentioned earlier. There will be a “Tristesse” boxset in the future, the album “Memories of a City” will be released as well as potentially an original music video for a song from that album. Thanks for allowing me to get so much off my mind!