

Behind the Music: Heavy Metal Musicians on Why They Sing of Rome

In recent years, the use of classical themes in heavy metal music has been on the rise, with artists throughout the world devoting entire albums to topics from Greek and especially Roman history, mythology, and literature. In my paper, I will explore this trend and what it tells us about the enduring legacy of Rome. By drawing on interviews I have conducted with the artists themselves, I will give the audience a complete look at the process from concept to finished product. In order to shed light on the recent surge in classical-themed heavy metal music, I will focus on three areas: 1) inspiration: what motivates heavy metal artists to use classical material for a song or an album; 2) process: how musicians go about researching, writing, and executing the concept in the studio; and 3) presentation: the ways in which they present the material to their audience onstage, in music videos, and in album artwork.

To take the audience behind the scenes, I will draw on interviews that I have conducted with several musicians who have used classical elements in recent releases. As the host of a radio program and website for the past 16 years, I have unique access to these artists and will focus on my conversations with four composers in particular: 1) Chrigel Glanzmann, vocalist for the Swiss band Eluveitie, whose 2012 concept album, *Helvetios*, tells the story of the Gallic Wars from the perspective of the Gauls; 2) Tomi Göttlich, bassist of Rebellion, a German band whose 2012 album, *Arminius: Furor Teutonicus*, is based on the events which culminated in the Battle of Teutoburg Forest; 3) Fabio Calluori, vocalist of the Italian band Heimdall, whose 2013 album, *Aeneid*, devotes one song to each book of Vergil's epic; and 4) Maurizio Iacono, vocalist of Ex Deo, a band whose songs exclusively deal with topics from Roman history.

Although the artists have all been inspired by the Roman world, their reasons for and approach to using it in their music differ greatly. While some artists are motivated by a longstanding scholarly interest, others are driven by a desire to pay tribute to their ancestors in telling the story through the use of a different medium. For the research process, the sources themselves range from ancient texts (e.g., Caesar) to historical fiction to online resources, like Wikipedia. In live performance, some bands dress up as Roman soldiers, but others rely solely on the music to convey their message.

By sharing these interviews, my goal is to explore what these projects tell us about the appeal of Roman themes, helping the audience to appreciate not only the works themselves but also the context in which they were created. While there are similarities between them, the albums also vary in many ways, and illustrate the complexity of the reception of Rome in modern popular culture.