

Soulfly

Somewhere between where life's uncertainty and nature's fury collide, Dark Ages resides. Singer/guitarist Max Cavalera, conductor of the innovative metal mavens Soulfly and co-founder of the renowned band Sepultura, returns with Soulfly's heaviest, most flammable work to date. Dark Ages marries the band's aggressive driving force with disarming experimentation - Soulfly hallmarks that are as unpredictable as they are brave. Armed with the same core band as found on last year's Prophecy (guitarist Mark Rizzo, drummer Joe Nunez, bassists Bobby Burns and Dave Ellefson), Cavalera also continues the tradition of adding guests into the mix and blowing sonic boundaries out of existence.

The explosive raw quality of Dark Ages is palpable. While making the record, Cavalera lost his grandson Moses and also experienced the tragedy of longtime friend, Dimebag Darrell's death. "I think one of the reasons it's called Dark Ages is it's also somehow personal dark ages...at the end of December [2004] when we were making the record, with losing Moses and Dimebag, it was a very dark month - it was a dark way to end the year," says Cavalera. It's evident on the album. It's confrontational. It surprises. There's a battle brewing: with the chaos of loss, anger, and hate - like a dam about to break, jarringly juxtaposed against some unexpected spiritual moments. Heaviness meets nature - in all its beauty and brutality. It's precisely that uneasiness - walking that fine line - which Cavalera wanted to capture. "Nature on one hand is beautiful, peaceful on the other hand it's lethal and ruthless as we see in tsunamis and things like that . . . Soulfly records are a bit like that: one side of it is very peaceful, very positive, very spiritual. And the other



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side is very apocalyptic, dark, even self destructive...I embrace the extremes."

As with 3 and Prophecy, Cavalera served as producer of Dark Ages. And it was mixed by Terry Date (Deftones, Pantera, White Zombie). Traveling to five countries - Serbia, Turkey, Russia, France, and the U.S. (though not intentional, it's symbolic as this is Soulfly's fifth effort), Cavalera recorded native artists as well as employed some unusual recording techniques. Turkey was chosen because "Constantinople was the center of Christianity one thousand years ago and I found it to be really exotic," he says. "I wanted to add some flavor of that part of the world on an album called Dark Ages." It was in that historical country, inside the ancient temple Hagia Sophia, that the disconcerting, tinny metal echoes serving as the outro to the speedball-infused "Bleak" was recorded. "It's actually people working, they're banging metal on metal."

Cavalera's quest to add fresh vibes to his love of metal continues throughout Dark Ages. Though Cavalera stretches the boundaries and adds many world flavors, the results are always subtle, giving each song a sound that is distinctly Soulfly. Cavalera wouldn't have it any other way. "It's unorthodox metal...I've been metal my whole life from when I started Sepultura, but it's a different kind of metal. I'm actually trying to create something new and trying to be a kind of scientist, like a metal scientist - fuse these things that normally would not fuse and see what happens when you combine them together. I love fast music, aggressive. I love metal, hardcore, and I love to combine them with other things. That's really my passion, making metal different somehow."

The cultural spice is accentuated by his decision to travel the world to capture the sounds within their own natural environments. While in Russia, the frantic "Molotov" begins with Russian lyrics. "In Russian it means 'Fuck the war, let's think about what's important'... It comes from the liberation of Russia after communism." S.O.D.'s Billy Milano makes a guest appearance as well on the song. Cavalera called Milano and said, "Do you mind singing over the phone and I just record it? . . . Even the distortion coming from his voice is actually from the phone."

Amid the darkness, there are also lyrics that inspire. A song entitled "Inner Spirit" is followed by "Corrosion Creeps." "Fuel The Hate" is flanked by "Stay Strong." There's conflict, a pulling between the spiritual and the turmoil. It challenges comfort levels, yet it can also be uplifting. Take the rhythmic rolling into full roar of "Inner Spirit," which blends the melodic vocal of Serbian artist Coyote, who also peppers the song with trombone into Cavalera's screams. Likewise, hope comes in the form of "Stay Strong," which features meandering melodies within the urgent speed. "My son Richie sings on 'Stay Strong.' I'm really proud of him 'cause he sings his own lyrics and he's really singing his heart out for Moses and for his brother Dana."

A gifted maverick at charting new explorations, Cavalera gives a nod toward some musical influences he also enjoys in the industrial realm occupied by bands like Prodigy and his side project Nailbomb. With the explosive "Riotstarter" he brings all the cultural elements together with Brazilian, Middle-Eastern, and industrial rhythms making one intoxicating brew.

As is tradition for Soulfly, the album is bookended by a song that shares the name of the album along with a closing eponymous epic entitled "Soulfly V." In France, Brazilian French musician Stephan helps close the record with the peaceful and evocative "Soulfly V." Cavalera added the real sounds of rain and thunder to flavor the song. After all the ferociousness that makes up Dark Ages, it culminates in a sprawling, almost peaceful end. It's appropriate, Cavalera says. "[After] going through the bad and the good and the rough, but in the end into this spiritual cleansing...it's kind of like the calm after the storm."

Soulfly provokes. It's metal for the daring. Dark Ages assaults as much as it does redeem. As Cavalera contends when he approaches Soulfly songs and albums, "I think more about a landscape of a movie" - always creating a sonic journey. Never safe and always engaging, Soulfly delivers another compelling album. Dark Ages is fierce and unrelenting, heavy and foreboding. Yet within the darkest depths, beauty exists.

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