

**Interview with David DeFeis** (Virgin Steele) about *The House Of Atreus*  
**Club Siddharta** (Prato, Italy), April 28th 2007

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**Q:** First of all, you are interested in Greek literature and Greek mythology, right?

**A:** Greek, Roman, Sumerian, anything that is preorganized Religion. I'm more interested in organized religion in its extent, where it had developed, because almost every so-called "big religion" - Christianity, Judaism, Islam - came from these earlier sources in a continuum: things don't exist in a vacuum: it begins and it's borrowed from one thing and it grows from there, I'm interested in all images of spirituality and I like to see where, I think you know, where organized religion went wrong. And what was good about some ancient religion and what was crazy about it. Some has its good and positive and negative sides.

**Q:** So mainly about the principles. Not the rituals, but the...

**A:** The basic ideas, where they came from. People keep asking me since I got here about the new album *Visions Of Eden* and the previous *The House Of Atreus*, and they ask me: are you a pagan or are you agnostic in such way? I don't like to put a name on these mystic things, but I guess if you had to put a name to somebody who thinks back to myth it would be close to that.

**Q:** Ok, for example, starting with *The House Of Atreus*, the lyrics of *Blaze of Victory* truly reflect the prologue of Aeschylus' Agamemnon, then in the other tracks the references are much more free, personal. Which criteria did you follow?

**A:** I have read the works, the plays of Aeschylus and also Euripides as well and the works of Edith Hamilton. Many things I've read, but I read them when I was a child, and they stayed with me a long long time and what happened was that they became part of me. Why I did the whole House of Atreus story? It was because I got this call from a crazy artistic director of a theatre in Germany. And he says in this phone call: -I would like you to write something like an opera-. And so I was, you know, on the phone and it came to my brain the name *House Of Atreus*. So I said: -Ok!!-. So that was the inspiration behind it, cause it was going to be a stage presentation. And I loved the story because it just felt so human to me, and I thought it had such echoes and reflections that resonate today, you know, something written three thousand years ago, and I wanted to explore it with today's eyes and show how all of the heroes did not have a nice homecoming. The whole point of Euripides and Aeschylus is that war is not a happy thing. It's not about the glory. I guess there are moments of glory, I suppose, but in reality with everyone killing each other, ultimately there is no glory in that, and everyone of the heroes, from Agamemnon to Achilles had an horrible end. So I wanted to pick up when the Trojan wars were ended and what happened to Agamemnon as he came home and have this cycle continuing, as the curse on the House was started earlier with the curse of Tantalus, and the war with his brother and the killing of the children and eating them. So this is the curse on the house and it's very interesting to me how it continues and it's happening today now with the first Bush dynasty and the second Bush dynasty and the whole war in Iraq. You know, it's part of us today, it's serious.

**Q:** So you are against the war in Iraq...

**A:** I'm against the whole war of course. But if somebody is coming to attack me, personally, then of course I will fight. You know, if somebody enters my home unwanted, uninvited, invades my people, my land, well then "I fight for my people, my home and my land" - this kind of things "Defiance!! Defiance!!" (quoting one of his songs) But I don't seek to create war, to create such a situation, I won't cause a war, I'm not gonna come to your home and take your oil and take your women, whatever, you know, this kind of things.

**Q:** And so, ok, coming back to the main question. Going into detailed stuff, for example *Great Sword Of Flame* and *The Fire God*, these songs, where do they come from? Did they come up from some other readings you had? Did they come up from Delphic religion?

**A:** *Great sword of flame* was the vengeance, the anger of Klytemnestra. *The Fire God* actually started life much earlier, but then I transformed the lyrics to fit more the story. I wanted the passion of this sister, Electra, to come forth - and she was much stronger than Orestes and I like the idea of strong women; it's a personal interest of mine: strong women. I believe in the equality of the sexes and I don't go on with the thought, you know, like this: -I'm the man so I must be so macho-. This kind of things and that women are lesser or weaker in some way. So she's the one who kind of kicks Orestes' ass to wake up: -Get up from your ass! Stop moping around, stop being depressive, and let's do something about the shit, let's get the glory of our house back-. I mean, maybe she is misguided, but she feels that power, that passion.

**Q:** She is the mind, he is the arm.

**A:** Yeah, she is.

**Q:** When you said "the rage of Klytemnestra", Elena wanted to make a reference to another particular being: Have you heard about the Alastor? It's a jinn, an evil spirit that haunts Atreus' blood. It's an evil created by the death of the son of Tantalus.

**A:** How do you spell it?

**Q:** A-L-A-S-T-O-R.

**A:** I don't remember this.

**Q:** About the story...for example, in your final Orestes dies.

**A:** Yeah, it doesn't happen in Aeschylus.

**Q:** I didn't get it exactly: how does it happen? Does he commit suicide?

**A:** He kills himself. Because he is forgiven by everyone else, but he can't forgive himself. So he says: -Ok, my time in this body, in this sphere of existence is finished and I will die and come back and be reborn. It's a sort of perennial dying and resurrecting god-man myth, like Adonis, like Mithras, like Dionysus, like Christ. So he's another version of Dionysus or Christ or somebody like this, for me. And also Cassandra for me is another version of Emalaith, my idea of her and the story. So I tried to intertwine some of what I was doing with *The Marriage Of Heaven And Hell* and *Invictus* also with *The House Of Atreus*; this to combine my own sort of mythology with these things. Cause ultimately, these works are not, as you can see, a historical lesson. It's my intention to say: "Ok, let's think about what's happening today and reality is poetic and very twisted, but my own life is in these works. You know especially, of course, in *Visions Of Eden* more than ever. It's not obvious to any one, even the people who are in there: that's intentional, it can't be so obvious you can't always leave yourself wide open, because then... it's not healthy for you.

**Q:** So when you chose that in the end there is the "Resurrection day".

**A:** A resurrection of sorts, that's the long line we were talking about.

**Q:** So Orestes cannot decide for himself, I mean he decides to commit suicide but he's not able to die, cause the Gods decide to resurrect him.

**A:** In a sense this is what happens, or he's reborn, perhaps, but he has a conscious memory of his former life, instead of it being erased.

**Q:** So he cannot escape his fate?

**A:** Yeah you can't escape your pain, you have to live with it in yourself. Ok, I fucked up; how can I do better the next time? This kind of things. You know, I like the idea of the eternal consciousness of the universe, I think there is a consciousness in the universe, I think the earth itself in the universe is alive, it is a living organism, like an amoeba, like a plant, like a human being. I think we are the flesh and our bodies are made as the microcosm of the universe. The stars, the Sun, the air and how it goes.

**Q:** All are one.

**A:** Yeah. We're all part of it. So, if you took off a limb from the tree, it doesn't kill the tree, and the tree is still alive and it spurts a new one in place of them.

**Q:** So it is for human beings, is that what you mean?

**A:** Yeah, I think so, you know. I am a humanist, I love humanity, but I don't always like people. Sometimes I seek the company of animals instead of people. But I believe in humanity and I believe in the divine in women and men.

**Q:** And. When you mentioned your German production on stage were you meaning your collaborations with Weiers?

**A:** Yeah! He called me up on the phone and he said: -I want you to try something like an opera-. Yeah, these are his exact words.

**Q:** So, how was it in Germany? Did you have this play in 2001, right?

**A:** No, no. Well, the first part came out in 1999-2000. So it must have been some. I forgot which year it was exactly, but it was one or the other. It was very close, it was summer and I had written of course the entire thing, the entire three CDs, we didn't release it all right away cause I was still recording fully everything, but they were all written at the same time. And so I had the whole body of the work to draw from. *The Wine of Violence* and all the things that appeared in the second CD, were in the production on stage. And it was two and a half - three hours long, it was quite long. They sang the songs in English, but there were spoken dialogues in German.

**Q:** Is this video available?

**A:** No, no. I have videos from it and when we do or, better, when I do, the DVD for Virgin Steele, it's not gonna be some stupid little thing of one live concert with a bit of bullshit backstage, drinking, farting. It's gonna be a complete historical perspective, and a very long one, and I will include the three separate operas I did: House Of Atreus, also I did one from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* and *Invictus* and then I did *Visions Of Eden*, a piece called *Lilith* in Germany, in the same theater, with Weiers. First the House, then we went back and explored what I had already written for *Marriage one*, *Marriage two* and *Invictus* and wrote an opera around this. And what came out was a sort of Nordic, dramatic piece and the production was almost like a comic book, very, you know, that kind of costumes and stuff.

**Q:** Yeah, I read it was very simple and direct, was it?

**A:** It was, yes. It wasn't my favourite of the three. The interpretation was very strange. Then came *Visions of Eden*, *Lilith*, the piece. Then we had a very interesting stage set up. The stage was like a mouth and came down to the first row of the audience. It was very difficult to walk on it, you had to be careful. And there was a big gate in the back that opened and closed and we had a film that sometimes went on beyond us. And fire and stuff like this.

**Q:** So it was not simple.

**A:** No, it was not simple. And those pieces of music haven't come out yet. Cause I wrote sixty or more songs for "Visions Of Eden" and then I had to condense it to those eleven that appear in the album. I wanted to release a box set, a triple CD, but the record company would not let me do this, so they said to me: -You're crazy, you're out of your mind!-

**Q:** It must have been really difficult to choose.

**A:** It is very difficult, yeah! But I'm working on the rest of the tracks and they'll come out.

**Q:** Is it still.

**A:** It's a continuum from the idea of the story: it's more, maybe, the manifestation in reality of it. Of course, if you read what *Lilith - Visions* is about, everything that happens in *Visions of Eden*, happens in the mind of a modern 21st century woman; actually, she's in the middle of being raped. So she thrushes back to the ancient Sumerian time of Sophia, Lilith the Goddess, when a Goddess was worshipped, around the Mediterranean, around here, where we are today. And how she was pushed out of spirituality by first the rise of a father God principle from the north and Nordic Myths and the course of Zeus, this kind of ideas. And later, the next nail in the coffin was the rise of Yaveh, Geova, this kind of things. They tore the feminine divine out of spirituality. So it's about the death of paganism and narcissism, and the eradication of the female principle. *Visions Of Eden* is a very heavy album. So continuing in the present days, what is actually happening is too hard. She becomes more aware of the injustice of the world, she escapes from the ideal and now it's more the brutality of what actually happens. It's very dark.

**Q:** It's dark and crude. I mean it's all about the truth. It's a spiritual form of what's happening. And, just another question about the representation in Germany: were the cruel and bloody events represented on stage during the performance?

**A:** Yeah. Very outrageous costumes and face painting and such... yes there was the killing of Klytemnestra, there was the killing of Agamemnon on stage. And the death of Orestes.

**Q:** Was there dancing as well?

**A:** Yes, there was.

**Q:** Another question about the lyrics: you added references about "angel's blood", "angel's wings" in both the first songs of the two CDs, in *Kingdom Of The Fearless* and *Wings Of Vengeance*. Was it a peculiar choice?

**A:** Let me think of the lyrics... in *Kingdom Of The Fearless*?

**Q:** "The angel of death, black wings caress your kingdom of lies, immortal youth dies!!!"

**A:** Oh, yes!!! Eh eh eh!! Thank you for reminding me!!! You know, it's the idea of his all-accomplishing power, of doom and destruction. Agamemnon is in a rage: -Lord Priam, I'll tear your head!!- It's so brutal. Have you seen the movie *Troy*? It's so brutal when they finally break through. And this was written long before the movie. If it happened - and it's quite possible it did happen - it was a very horrific thing: ten years of cruel war. Of course every war is quite cruel and so unnecessary. We were on the plane coming over, I was thinking of course about September 11th, and bombings and this is what's going on in the world. Why? You know, who cares what you really believe in? Why do we have to kill each other to make our point? If you are so strong in your beliefs, it doesn't matter if someone else doesn't believe in you, or in what you believe in. You believe your thing, I believe my thing; and this is what was nice about paganism - I'm not trying to say that paganism was the golden age: they had their problems too. But essentially, as the strength of woman was disliked in Christianity. The Christians used to say: just fight up the paganism, we can't argue with these pagans, they're always disagreeing with us. We all seek the divine in our own way.

**Q:** You're saying that paganism was much more tolerant than other religions. I think the Romans were an example, cause they did not suppose that the others were taking their religion. Everyone was worshipping his own Gods.

**A:** Call it a different name, but it's the same idea. And this is what I'm trying to say in Visions. And I try to explain the roots of organized religions, where they came from. So, yeah, that's all part of the general doom of the thing. I don't think also that angels are necessarily nice creatures.

**Q:** That one was an angel of death.

**A:** Yeah.

**Q:** We were thinking that in Greek mythology there are no angels, I mean, so we were wondering if it was a specific choice. Is it a representation of Hades, for example?

**A:** What it is, is that I tend to practice what I preach. I cross poems and make references to all the things that I studied; cause I don't compartmentalize: -Oh, this is Sumerian, this is Greek, this is Nordic-. It's all the same to me. This is Christian, this is Judaism, this is Islam: it's all the same. So I joint all on.

**Q:** It's spirituality.

**A:** You can call it whatever you want; just don't call me late for dinner! Eh eh! That's it!!

**Q:** Was it a choice that all roles (also feminine roles) were represented with your voice and not, for example, asking for a female singer?

**A:** The answer of course is: it's rock 'n' roll! It's not from the historical side. Yes, I'm the singer of Virgin Steele and I did not want the album to be kind of hijacked by a venture singer, you know, from different things. I wanted it to be a Virgin Steele album and it was done in the same spirit of an album like The Who's *Tommy* with three different singers on that, because they all sing, but the Virgin Steele don't sing: it's just me. So I do it, you know. This is what. Cause I wanted the album to be received on several levels. One, you can take it as the concept and understand it from what is actually being said, formally, directly, or you can just enjoy it as a piece of rock music. And that's it: very simple, nothing more.

**Q:** I think it was both.

**A:** Yeah, I tried to make it both and it's universal quality what I tried to bring to it. And also Virgin Steele is a very close society. We don't invite many people in to participate with us: we just try to explore the strength of the band as it is and we do the best we can. We push ourselves, I push myself to feel those little feelings - the band push themselves to play all these different feelings and it comes out, and it's a Virgin Steele album. It's not Virgin Steele plus the lounge of philharmonic and, you know, every rock singer in the Rock Hard core magazine.

**Q:** Ok, that's all! Thank you very much for everything!

**A:** You're welcome! By the Gods!

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