

# A Winged Victory for the Sullen Interview

Posted: 19/09/2011 | Interview



Every now and again an album comes along which combines presence, quality and well observed human emotion so genuinely that they immediately capture the listener. Adam Wiltzie and Dustin O'Halloran have, in their new project 'A Winged Victory For The Sullen', created one such record. These seven beautifully crafted works of ambient modern classical had me bowled over; possessing an elegant beauty, intimacy of delivery and production in a unique compositional style. With such an impactful work, I wanted to know more - here's what Dustin and Adam told us.

## **What's the story behind the name: 'A Winged Victory for the Sullen'?**

AW - I had visited this island in Greece called Samothraki and there is a famous statue called “nike samothrice” which translates to “the winged victory of...”. It was stolen and now sits in the entry hallway of the Louvre. I liked the ring of it. But I thought it sounded a bit too hopeful. There is a very sullen slow quality to the music so it just seemed to fit for us.

## **Adam you've said "I feel like I have finally figured out what I am doing" after 20 years making ambient music, can you explain that? How has your approach to this album varied to that of Stars of the Lid works?**

AW - I have a healthy disdain for artists that get lost in the notion that what they do is somehow more important than the rest, but I don't think that makes me some old fuck with an axe to grind. Unfortunately, that is what it feels like most of the time. A Miss America contest. We have end of the year best of lists, which give some kind of evaluation of what is good and bad. Who cares what we think about their impact as it relates to the musical landscape?

Ultimately, we just make music. Our impact will not really be know until long after we are dead, and sadly

for most of us, in less than 100 years or so it will be as if we never existed. So where am I going with this? I reckon I just have a really hard time taking myself seriously, and in the end music was never something I thought I was particularly good at. It always feels like a constant struggle? Which maybe led me to say this, because in context to the winged victory record, it was such a joy and pleasure to create this. There were times that I just completely knew where I was going with the writing, and structure. I am not sure if I have finally turned a corner, but I suppose I can only hope.



**'Requiem for the Static King Part 1' is dedicated to the memory of Mark Linkous, how much of the album is concerned with losing Mark? Was writing and playing these pieces a cathartic experience in this regard?**

AW - There is a lot of links in the record in spirit. I am very sentimental, if it was not for Mark, I never would have met dustin, and AWFVTS never would have happened, and we would not be sitting here doing this interview. On a personal level he died 6 months after we started the recording, and after I returned from his funeral I was really down. The next time we got together we came up with part one of his requiem, he deserved nothing less. The man was one of the most beautiful people I have ever met, and my life will never be the same without him.



**The instruments and recording locations seem to have been important factors in the composition of the album, can you tell us about the pianos you sourced, and how you decided on these locations? Was recording in churches a conscious decision to shape the end sound?**

DO - Yes it was definitely an important part of the whole creative process. When we started writing the pieces we realised we were using really wide open and big sounds and lots of low end on the piano and we made some decisions in the beginning that we would get out of our studio and use real acoustic spaces instead of trying to recreate them in the computer. I had a concert coming up at the Grunewald church in west Berlin and there is this piano. Its just one of most amazing sounding instruments on the planet with incredibly clear bass and in this church there is a great pure reverb. We spent all night there after the concert and did a lot of these takes at about 4 am that morning when it was really quiet outside. The strings were recorded in the old DDR east Berlin studios, most of the East german music and radio programs were recorded there..and some of these rooms are exactly the way they were..it feels like going back in time. There is a chamber orchestra room thats sounds amazing there..and you can feel the history...I always believe these things add to a recording.

**You also processed solely with analogue on to magnetic tape - why did you chose to do this?**

DO - Mainly because we had recorded so many acoustic instruments in large spaces we wanted to keep the integrity of the recordings and keep it as pure and open as we could. There is almost no compression on the record or in the mastering, something that does not really happen much these days anymore. Also the decision to go tape was also to commit to mixes..we mixed through a board and the final mixes to tape so we could not go back and change things. Computer mixes can give you a lot of choices and you can get lost in this sometimes...we wanted to keep it pure and go with our instincts. Maybe I'm old fashioned but I think there is an energy when you mix a record like this.. You have to really be present and this translates on tape.



**How many other musicians - strings, horns etc - were involved, were their parts also recorded on site with you both (rather than remotely) and how long did the album take to complete?**

DO - We worked with string quartet, 2 french horns, a virtuoso bassoon player named Hugo Barone, the rest Adam and I played. We did everything together...that was another decision..to be in the same room while we were working on it and not do it remotely. We both work alone most of the time and it was nice change to get out our own heads for a while. Plus we both have the same taste in good wine, whiskey and foods, so it was always a good excuse to get together!

The record took almost exactly 2 years from the very first day we started writing something until till we mastered. I think for a record like this it could not happen any faster. These things need time.

**Was each track fully composed before recording sessions started, and did you change/rework any of the pieces?**

DO - Everything was pretty composed by the time we were recording..but as always there are somethings that happen when you are in the studio and somethings change...but for the most part we had a clear vision of what we wanted.



**The album has an identity of melancholic tinted beauty, delicate atmospherics and intimate touch which is consistently strong throughout. You must be pleased with the positive response to it so far, are you looking forward to touring - do you prefer the feedback of a live audience?**

AW - We start rehearsing next week, so after this long process of recording I am really excited to re-ignite the compositions in a new way.

It is like we have to rebuild the puzzle all over again. RE:feedback from audiences? I am pretty ambivalent about this. Playing live can be completely rewarding, and some nights the stage can be the loneliest place on earth.

**Will you be working together as Winged Victory again or is this a one off piece?**

AW - We will do another one for sure. We have a few solid tracks left over from the first recording sessions, and we really had such a lovely time together in the studio. It was too rewarding to not try again.