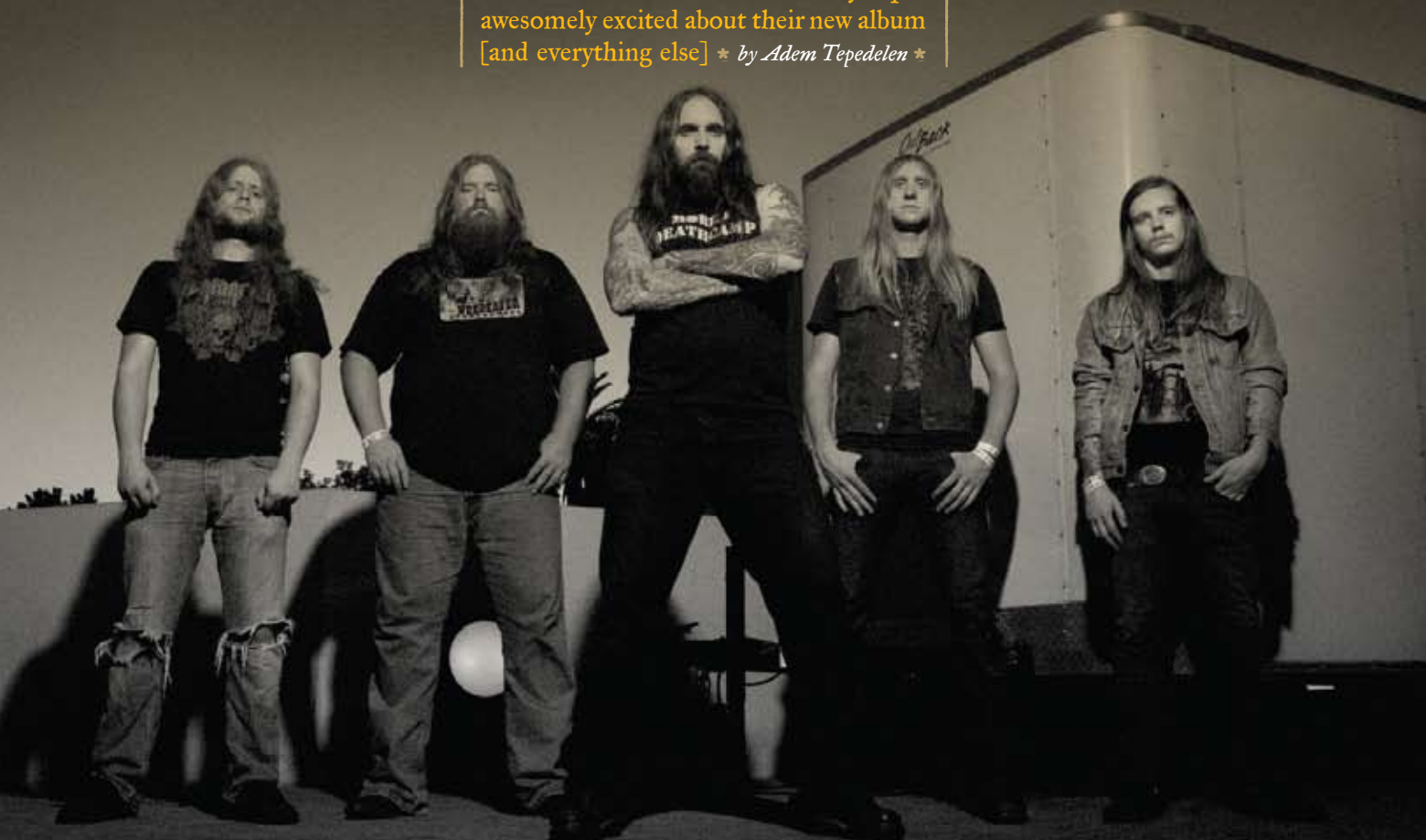


ALL FIRED UP

SKELTONWITCH are really super awesomely excited about their new album [and everything else] * by Adem Tepedelen *



IN THE CRAZY,

mixed-up world of what's-old-is-new-again, we find Seattle producer Jack Endino—best known for his work on seminal grunge releases like Mudhoney's *Superfuzz Bigmuff*, Soundgarden's *Screaming Life* and Nirvana's *Bleach* in the late '80s—suddenly becoming the go-to guy for the heavy metal set in 2009. OK, maybe just one faction of the heavy metal set: those looking for something with real substance and heart in a plastic, over-processed and mostly phony Pro Tools world. But you can count Skeletonwitch—that Athens, OH, quintet people keep rather foolishly confusing for a retro thrash band—as unabashed converts to Team Endino. They spent nearly a month in Seattle at Studio Litho [which is owned by Pearl Jam/Green River guitarist Stone Gossard] recording their latest Prosthetic effort, *Breathing the Fire*, with the so-called Godfather of Grunge, and they couldn't be happier with the results. Seriously, *really* happy.

"He is fucking awesome," guitarist Scott Hedrick gushes. "I love that man. He is a studio wizard. He's like a Zen master behind the mixing board. It was so awesome to work with him."

Specifically what made Hedrick and his bandmates—guitarist Nate Garnette, vocalist Chance Garnette, bassist Evan Linger and drummer Derrick Nau—so interested in working with Endino was the very thing he's been doing for more than 20 years: making sense out of loud, heavy rock bands. "We wanted organic-sounding production, but we also wanted it to sound big," explains Hedrick. "A lot of producers sacrifice one for the other. We felt [Jack] has consistently been producing organic-sounding records that still sounded huge." Though everyone from Tad to Bruce Dickinson could have attested to this fact, one of Endino's more recent jobs, High on Fire's *Death Is This Communion*, sealed the deal for Skeletonwitch. "[That album] sounds so monstrous," says Hedrick. "The guitars are huge. Everything about it is killer."

Though it'd be a stretch to say that Skeletonwitch have much in common with HOF musically, they share an old-school aesthetic that doesn't necessarily manifest itself in such an obvious way as some of the let's-dress-like-Exodus-in-'85-revivalists currently waving the thrash banner. These Ohioans are just dudes who want to play modern metal that doesn't specifically sound like another era, but maybe has the sound (i.e. production values) of another era, if that makes any sense. Getting Endino involved—an

unapologetic Motörhead freak from way back—ensured that they'd be working with someone who, at the very least, understood their specific point of view and could accurately capture it on tape. And the improvements from 2007's *Beyond the Permafrost* are immediately noticeable.

"There's a lot more bass presence on this record," says Hedrick, listing a number of differences between the two albums. "The drums sound massive. The vocals are a lot clearer. That's partially due to Chance and partially due to Jack, as well. I think Chance really stepped

When I write stuff, I'm always trying to recreate those feelings that I had when I heard really cool riffs or songs or bands for the first time. —*Scott Hedrick*

up his game and his vocal style and projected it better and made it more clear. You can understand just about everything he says. And also, Jack did a really good job with the mix and putting it all together. Overall, it's just a lot more massive."

It's also more sympathetic to Skeletonwitch's m.o., which is all about songs and less about sheer impact. These dudes don't want to pummel you into submission; they wanna (metaphorically speaking) throw their arm around your shoulder and headbang next to you at the front of the stage. I mean, if you think Hedrick was

enthusiastic about working with Jack Endino, his *joie de vivre* for writing killer songs is off the fucking charts.

"Personally I'm trying to recreate when I was younger and I first heard certain metal bands," he says. "Like when I first heard Mercyful Fate's 'The Oath,' when that riff comes in after that stormy intro and evil keyboard—the first time I heard that, I about shit myself. I was like, 'This is the best thing I've ever heard in my life!' So, when I write stuff, I'm always trying to recreate those feelings that I had when I heard really cool riffs or songs or bands for the first time."

It's this approach, however, that has no doubt caused Skeletonwitch in the past to be rather lazily lumped in with the growing number of retro-thrashers. Because, as Hedrick puts it, "We love thrash metal and there's a big thrash influence there." But it's definitely not the only influence at play. "When [we're] writing riffs or song parts or leads, we're trying to please ourselves first," he insists. "And if that may end up sounding a little bit more like death metal or a little bit more like black metal, we don't care. Whatever gives us chills musically."

Add a little Viking metal to the mix, and that pretty well sums up the *Breathing the Fire* experience. It's actually remarkable to hear how Skeletonwitch have assimilated an array of styles and turned them into actual songs. "We don't just kind of throw together every riff we have and go, 'There it is,' one after another, right in a row," notes Hedrick. "We try to create a little bit of a dynamic and ebb and flow to it. Hopefully each song has its own characteristic and you can actually remember distinctly which one they are. You may not like them, but you can easily separate them."

Hedrick goes back to another classic metal reference to further his point. "Judas Priest still sounds like Judas Priest—they're one of my favorite, if not my favorite, bands of all time—but each song is different."

And seeing as how Skeletonwitch are a two-guitar outfit, we feel obligated to follow up with the most obvious next question. Are you the K.K. or Glenn in the band?

"Glenn Tipton," he says without pause. "At least I want to be. I fuckin' love that guy, dude. He's so awesome." [dB]