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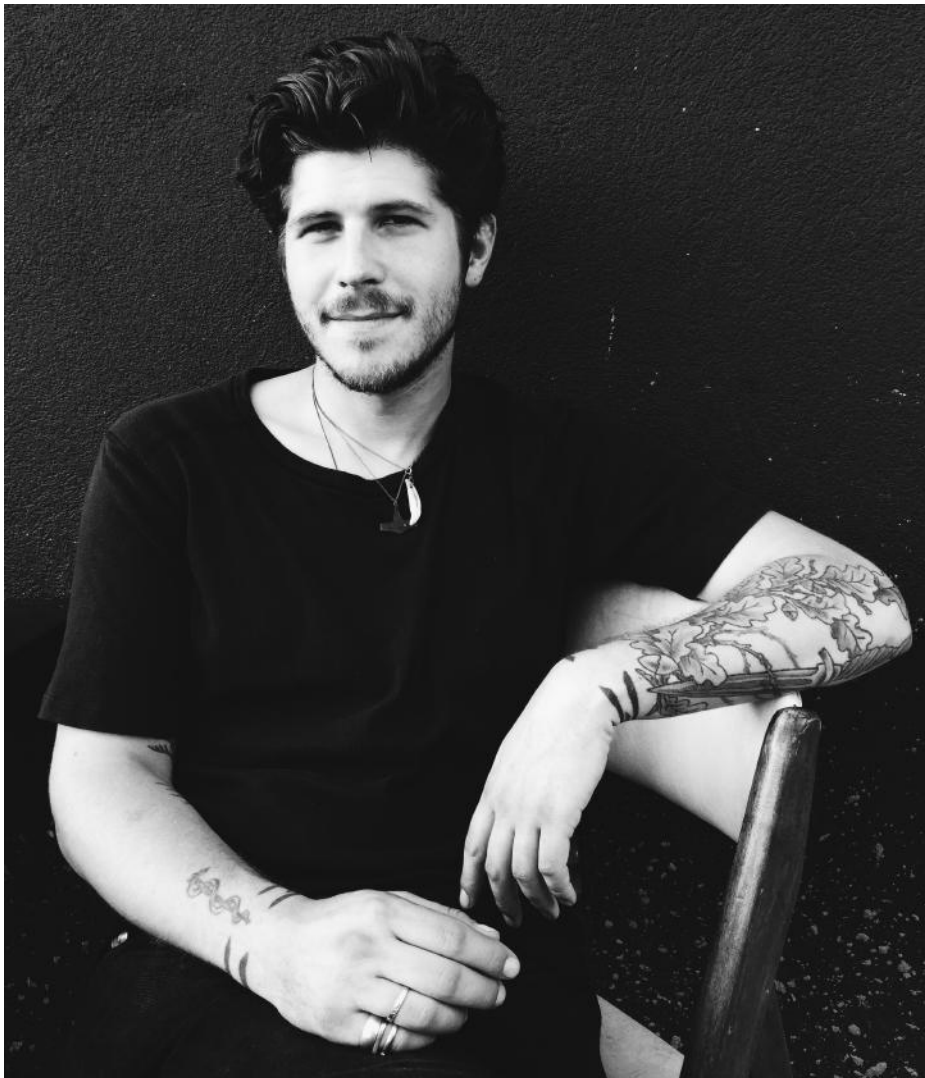
*An Interview with Luke Tromiczak of Blood and Sun
by Malachy O'Brien*

Luke Tromiczak has risen to prominence as the intellectual mind behind Blood & Sun but hasn't had many opportunities to elaborate on the philosophy and influences behind his music. There are few contemporary neofolk artists that don't think outside the mainstream social dogma, so Malachy O'Brien took the opportunity to sit down with Tromiczak to attempt to pry out these thoughts and their application to his art.

Malachy O'Brien: Thanks for taking the time to sit and have a chat with us. There's no better privilege for me than to talk with one of neofolk's rising stars, particularly as you are about to tour with some of its most well-known artists. What can you tell us about the forthcoming tour with :Of the Wand and the Moon:?

Luke Tromiczak: Thank you for the opportunity. As we both know, **Blood and Sun** is a relatively new venture started just over four years ago in Minneapolis, Minnesota. I knew the debut album was a strong venture with all the talented musicians contributing to the recording and the patient engineer Paul at **Sunless Houses** capturing it. It really fulfilled what I hoping for after **Big Bad Bob** at **Absinthe Studio** put his ear to it to organize the cacophony. I certainly wasn't expecting the response it's received. It should be noted that I've been in contact with **Kim Larsen** from :Of the Wand and the Moon: for as long as I've known about his projects, which is running up on ten years now. I remember in one of my first fan messages I said I'd have a project to show him in the coming years, and as things would unfold he actually was my first European customer to purchase the *White Storms Fall LP*.

This past spring, I was afforded the opportunity to tour Europe after playing **Wave Götik Treffen** in Leipzig, Germany, and with the help of a mutual friend in the Netherlands, I got in contact with Kim and **Thomas Bøjden** in Denmark to organize a show Copenhagen after I was already on the ground. I spent about a week in Copenhagen staying with **Iver** the giant who plays guitar in :Of the Wand and the Moon:. Kim, Thomas, and I spent a good amount of time hanging out in smoke-filled bars and parks drinking beers and discussing folk, art, culture, and where we should get the next beer.



Luke Tromiczak

MO: *I've not met or conversed with Larsen via any medium, but the feedback I get of him is generally as you have described. It's interesting you say that Blood and Sun is a 'new venture' as I often refer to neofolk itself as being relatively new. With your long-term prior communication with Larsen, did you set out to capture the sounds and aesthetics of neofolk? Were bands like :Of the Wand and the Moon: in the back of your mind during the process?*

LT: I certainly wasn't writing the songs in a vacuum, and my introduction to folk music in my adult life was through neofolk via black metal via growing out of coming up as a filthy punk-rock kid. It struck my contemplative side. I prefer heathen folk to neofolk as a term. Ultimately, I was writing songs I wanted to listen to and dealing with emotions that my metal outputs weren't able to voice.

MO: *Interesting you say 'songs ... that my metal outputs weren't able to voice' and that you identify your music with the Heathen side of folk. A lot of metal bands correlate with Heathenism, but why did you choose to remove that aesthetic from metal and tone it down with a more tepid sound such as 'folk'?*

LT: Within metal, I sought much more to purge the morality that is absorbed when growing up in a Christian environment. The first outputs being of a very anti-monotheist satanic bent. That said, nature and the shadow sides of Heathenism crept in very quickly. Yet, no matter how you cut it, it was violent, distant, and sovereign. It was an odd place where **Foucault**, **Bataille**, **Nietzsche**, **Lautréamont**, and **Marcuse**, had arguments in my head, and **Vivaldi** played on slashed speakers.

I knew that it was for the fire years, so to speak. I had begun writing music that would become Blood and Sun at the same time, but I wanted to wait. Questions that were plaguing me regarding dissolution, heartbreak, and illness were not appropriately addressed via black metal.



Luke Tromiczak



Erik Proft (left) and Luke Tromiczak (right)

I prefer the term “heathen folk” because of the spiritual aspects of the music. The Havamal and Völuspá had tremendous impact on me in coming to terms with mortality. The myths live when you invite them in, and I experienced this in a very impactful way. It was also a way to re-read Nietzsche’s tight-rope walker and the mask from a less crass point in my life.

MO: *Has the morality been purged? Now do you wish to balance your ‘chakras’, so to speak, with a cathartic reference to your current, more mature state of mind?*

LT: I wouldn’t go so far as to say I’m in a superior place or have reached any sort of spiritual plateau, but it’s a different place that wouldn’t exist without the former. It’s an easy trap to invert Christian “Universalism” and end up becoming the self-righteous, jealous Jehovah wearing black, which seems like a boring place to me.

MO: *The late **John Murphy** said in an interview about seven years ago: ‘The scene (post-industrial) tends to attract people that think more.’ From your anecdote of internal conflict involving some renowned philosophers and composers, it seems as though you are a match made in heaven in accordance with John Murphy’s principle. How do you channel that deep thought and or conflict and transpose it into the work of *Blood and Sun*? Do these thoughts impact your lyrics and music?*

LT: Yes, they impact the lyrics. Lyrics are really what carry dark folk when it’s working well, and lyrics that feel didactic really do not sit well with me. It’s like the difference between looking at creativity in mannerist paintings versus the state propaganda in neoclassicism of the French academy. They should invite the listener to think beyond the song. So, I guess if the songs are working well they are ruminations on things I’ve gleaned from reading and living. I’d have to say some of my favorite lyrics on *White Storms Fall* are borrowed though. “Lord of the Spring” was really written by **Tommy Ashe**, and I drastically reworked or rephrased them. And the “*like fire in winter*” lyric came from **Jayoe**, an unknown folk singer but a renowned painter from Minnesota.

MO: *That reminds me of **Andrew King**. To many of his fans, he isn't renowned as a painter so much as he is a folk singer despite being equally talented at both! How has the overall reaction to 'White Storms Fall' been, from a sales and touring perspective?*

LT: It's been a wonderful response. There are only 500 of the LP/CD hardcover, but to my knowledge they're still available from **Pesanta** and **Midheaven Mailorder**. There's soon to be a repress on CD very similar to the LP's layout. I certainly haven't quit my day-job, though I'll likely have to anyway to go on this upcoming tour.

Reviews in general have been favorable and the release afforded me the opportunity to play to Montreal, Canada in 2014 and, later, Europe for the first time in a string of seven shows in five European countries in 2015.



Luke Tromiczak



Angela McJunkin (left) and Luke Tromiczak (right)

MO: *You've mentioned that you prefer the term 'heathen folk' to 'neofolk'. Some might say they are 'six of one/half a dozen the other' when you look at the post-folk scene on a broad-brush basis. What aspects of Heathenism do you familiarize with and to what extent?*

LT: It's a good question. I'd have to say it's a personal preference of identification. The terms really don't matter other than a loose categorization in terms of sonic or aesthetic comparisons.

Antony and the Johnsons have very little to do with neofolk but lyrically have a great similarity to **Current 93**. **16 Horsepower** has nothing to do with black metal but share a similar intensity and dark character to some of the best French black metal outfits. Labels help for shorthand comparisons, but often operate much more as a ghetto.

In terms living as a Heathen, I feel much more inspired spiritually and artistically than I do dogmatically or traditionally from myths and orientation offered by the pagan world. I have respect for people that come together to practice Heathenism in communal settings, but aside from being a guest at a few blots and sumbles, I have little experience with group-oriented ritual or religious practices. I've always operated outside of groups. Even a four-person band can be too much for me.

MO: *Other than **Pascal Humbert** (16 Horsepower's bass player) being French, how do you correlate the intensity of 16 Horsepower with French black metal?*

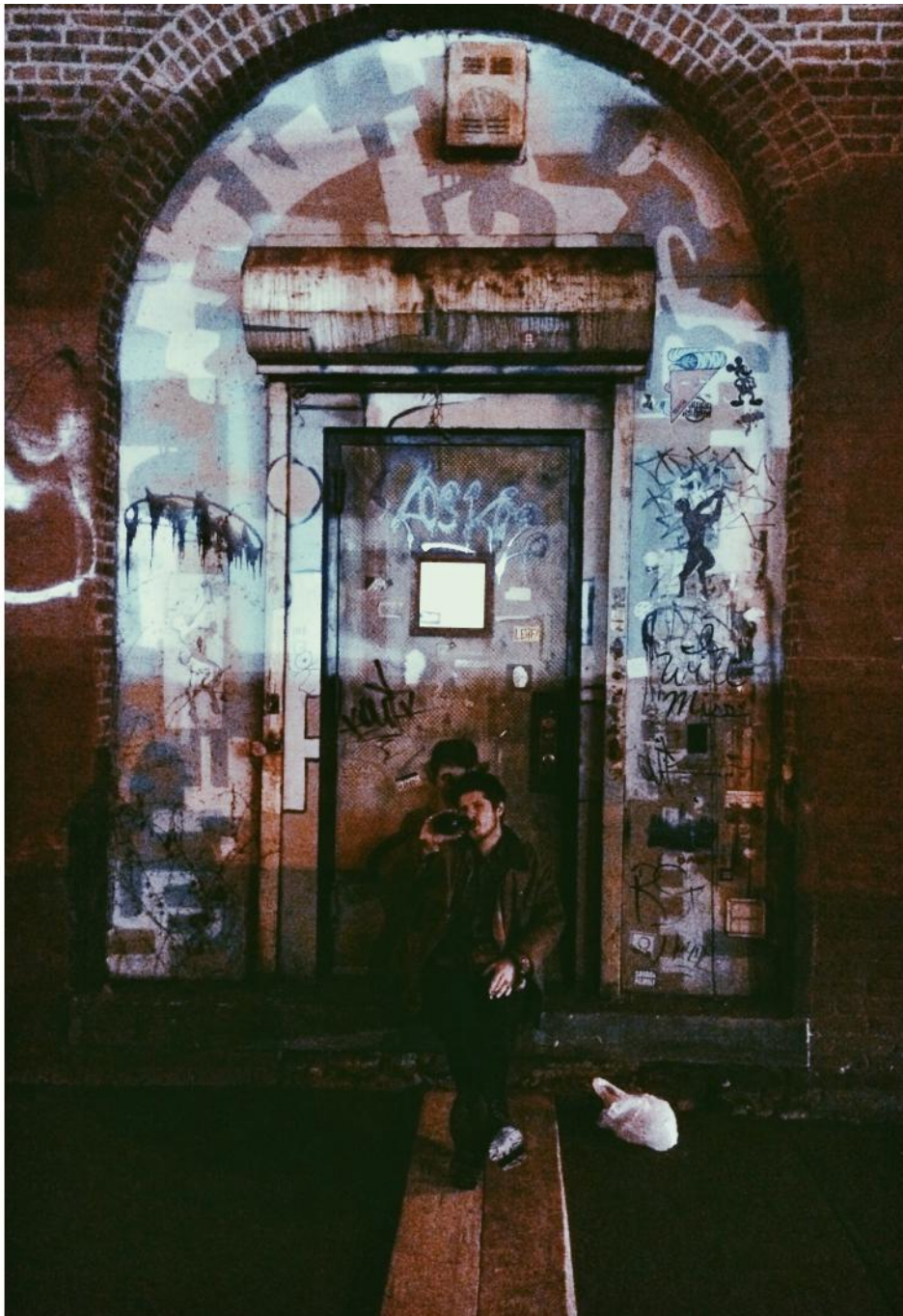
LT: I just said there was no connection besides intensity. Interestingly enough, sonically I was referring to some of the arrangement between guitar and bass on songs like "American Wheeze" or "Strong Man" compared to hearing **Merrimack** or **Watain** (Swedish, obviously) live. It happens a bit more with orthodox black metal where the bass is allowed some space to walk, but again, my point is that categorization tends to ghetto music for easy literary comparison.

MO: *I've always loved **David Eugene Edwards'** film clips, especially 'Black Soul Choir'. They add a more specific darkness to the already 'dark Americana' genre. Do you have plans to add this aesthetic to your music?*

LT: I admire David Eugene Edwards' music because of its idiosyncratic sincerity. I feel his severity and sincerity lacks in a lot of the other Denver Sound bands. In writing music, I don't survey the land and see what I can appropriate. This is pitfall. I'm much more interested in writing music and discovering by becoming what Blood and Sun is.

MO: *Going back to your comment on operating outside of groups and four-person bands being too much for you, is there a clash or feared conflict of interest, requirement for control, etc.?*

LT: It happens naturally for me. I love what Blood and Sun has afforded me in terms of working with a wide range of people in a loose way, especially when the experience of working in Blood and Sun is countered by my experiences of going to Thursday band practice for an hour in some shitty shared studio that is tucked away in a nondescript industrial area of some who-the-fuck-cares American city. Some of my favorite rehearsals were on the Mississippi River bank in the sunset during summer, or by the fireside while snowed in at **Stella Natura**.



Luke Tromiczak



Luke Tromiczak (left) and Thomas Ashe (right)

But to answer your question directly, most of the people I work with in Blood and Sun already have other projects cooking. **Tanner Anderson** is the mind behind both **Celestial** and **Obsequiae**. **Erik Wivinus** is the frontman of **Thunderbolt Pagoda** and the **Quaking Bog**. **Erik Proft** fronts **Kama Rupa**. Tommy is an acupuncturist, a father, and a baker. **Angela McJunkin** is a bit more nomadic than the rest and contributes to many projects, working with poets and dancers while teaching children piano and making jewelry as well as metal sculptures.

Right now, as I write this, I am finishing recording guitars and vocals for a track called “The Confession”—a song inspired by the life and writing of **Saint Augustine** (oddly enough for me) for a compilation entitled *The Communion of the Saints* which will be released by **Brave Mysteries** and a few partnering labels this spring. I sent them to **Clay Ruby** of **Burial Hex**, who is playing piano and recording Angela on cello tomorrow in Madison, Wisconsin. So, it’s a rotating cast and often by any means available to get a project done.

That said, Blood and Sun is primarily me. I write the songs, I direct the aesthetic, I have final say in recordings, and I make the plans. It’s just simpler that way. I do my best to accommodate other peoples’ goals or desires when they partner with me, but I have to have the ultimate say.

MO: *What can you tell me about these tracks that you gave me a preview of, and can any of them be expected on the upcoming tour?*

LT: This week a 7” split with Swedish/Wisconsin-based band **Brittsommar** is being released on Pesanta Urfolk with a version of the song “At Rest,” and yes, many of the new songs I’ve been performing since February of last year. I’m currently working on recordings for two 7” releases: one on Kim Larsen’s **Heiðrunar Myrkrunar**, and the other on **Thomas Cowgill’s Not Just Religious Music**. The decision to put these songs on 7” EPs or singles was to be able to release a few songs that felt both too temporal and topical for an album and that paired nicely with one another. The songs are segues before I start working on a new album which lyrics are underway for.



Luke Tromiczak

The first 7" will be *Dusk Century/Lavender Letters* on Heiðrunar Myrkrunar. Both songs deal with the vertigo of being in New York City and a few experiences that felt like they fell out of the film *Synecdoche NY* or *Jacob's Ladder*. The comparison to the Denver Sound or David Eugene Edwards is apt on "Lavender Letters," for better or worse, but it is ultimately more directly influenced by **Richard** and **Mimi Farina**. I was working in DADGAD tuning for the song, so it has that droning resonance.

The Second 7" will be called *Cain's Orchard* and will feature a song by that name and a song called "Until the Dawn." Both songs deal with what it is to leave a place, what it means to come back, what is inherently lost when you break that organic contact, and grapples with forgiveness.

In terms of songwriting, the guitar performances are more varied and will be more consciously arranged than *White Storms Fall* which, as nice as the production turned out to be, was a punk-rock record in spirit where everything played all at once.

MO: *After that brief 'tease', I can't wait to get my hands on those releases. I recently completed a review on a record. I have long tried to single out the stereotype or demographic that is drawn to various folk-based genres. I've personally come to the conclusion that folk music is intrinsic. How does this philosophy sit with you?*

LT: Intrinsic in relationship to what, exactly?

MO: *Intrinsic in that people find a deeper awakening or some connection to their roots or heritage. To me, those that don't appreciate 'folk' music are more in tune with what's around them or yet to be discovered (i.e. the progression of modern music).*

LT: Well, that gets to be a bit tricky. I think that folk music in general does long to hear the whispers of the past. I feel that people attracted to it want to have more of a relation to the natural world as well as a world that is contemplated while experienced—to live a life in a world that is re-sacralized and to have relations with others that are more meaningful and less self-absorbed or alienated. I'd have to say it should be deeper and more plastic—more resilient—than heritage. The pagan world exists in the past, but the pagan gods exist in the present, grow in the present, and grew with their people.

We're kind of at the inverse of what Saint Augustine was dealing with coming from a pagan world embracing a new God. We're attempting to tell the jealous Universalist God to fuck off and find a base and an imperative beyond secular materialism.

MO: *I suppose there is some delineation between that which is intrinsic and that which is inherent—'inherent' in that paganism (sans the revivals) seems to be 'bygone' and the folk styles are similar. The two cross over. Not many pagans/heathens are unfamiliar with **Wardruna's** works, for instance.*

LT Ah, yes, techno pagans and the hurdy-gurdy. (*laughs*) I agree, the work they are doing is impressive but also completely reliant upon modern home studios. It's a good example of unearthing something 'ancient' only to realize that it's been here all the while, living and willing to grow within you.

MO: *How did you come to add the hammered dulcimer and hurdy-gurdy to 'White Storms Fall'? Was there some historic connection, or was it a fortuitous moment?*

LT: I knew Tanner played dulcimer, and I wanted to hear what it sounded like. He also had a hurdy-gurdy, but the music I write is not traditional and often played in minor or chromatic scales, so it's not quite in-line with more primitive and traditional forms of either instrument. It's less historic than it is romantic. I wanted an organic sound, a woodsy sound, and, yes, an *old* sound. Tanner is invested in Medieval music and traditional folk music and is a musician in the true sense. I'm much more ham-fisted, and with a ham-fist lunch is only an arm away.

MO: *On that note, is there anything you would like to tell fans in general?*

LT: As for the people who have been following what Blood and Sun has been doing, thank you! I work full-time behind a bar serving Wall Street ass-hats (and a few good eggs—*very* few). I hate it. Being reminded that there is more than that out there—people to share with, laugh with, learn with, and who push each other forward and upwards—is beyond redeeming. I don't really feel I have fans as much as I do friends and companions when I get the chance to meet them.



Luke Tromiczak