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Velvet Kills

Interview by Elizabeth Rhodes

Roll Call
Su Eko: voice, bass
Harris Iveson: guitar, keyboards

When did the band get started and what was the original intention of the band?

Velvet Kills: We started not long after we first met, around 2015, after a fortuitous encounter on the dance floor. We were both getting out of other projects, looking for new directions in art. We went through a lot of changes in the beginning, searching for a sound that we could identify with together as a group. We didn't actually have a particular sound in mind when we started, and since we both had pretty different musical backgrounds and influences it took a bit of experimentation to blend our ideas, but this is something we've come to really appreciate about Velvet Kills. It's never something that either of us would have done on our own. We're always surprising ourselves and encouraging each other to try new things and since we don't like to do the same thing for too long the sound is always unfolding in new ways.

Tell us more about your name: how does it communicate the sound or vibe of the band?

VK: Velvet Kills' name is inspired by the ying yang concept. When the combination of dark and light gather to balance each other. VK gives us the voice to pass our learnings, experiences and energies to people. It's also a quagmire of emotions and feelings. It's soft and spiky at the same time. So, it allows us to express anything that needs to come out. Whatever we're feeling, whatever we need to say is welcome. And that goes for the musical arrangements as well. We're not tied to specific formats of songs or instrumentation. We use them also, but we have the space to venture into more abstract places and experiment, which is really where we find a lot of the fun.

How would you describe your music to someone who has not yet checked you out?

VK: Get ready for a new experience! The Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa used to say "Primeiro estranha-se, depois entra-se," something like, "First you get strange, then you get intrigued." We've always had a bit of a hard time describing our music. We usually say something like, "It's kind of rock music with some electronic influences." Early on, a music journalist came to a show and told us that by the end of the gig he'd be able to tell us what style it was. So, we went up to him afterwards, excited to see what he had to say, and he stood there with a kind of bewildered look on his face, and he said "Well... It's different!" Of course, we took that as a big compliment. We also like some of the new names that record labels and reviewers give it: synth-glam, neo wave. I think our favorite was electro-sex-rock. The reviewer said that it was the perfect music to listen to while having wine and sex. We like that description!



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What inspires you to create this style of music?

VK: We collect inspirations through so many sources: from life itself, people's minds or our own minds, places, sounds, artists, performances, images, dreams, a nice talk, etc. We translate the emotions from these experiences into sound, creating our own universe of storytelling. We don't think about fitting into a specific style; our inspirations are rooted in a combination of rock n roll, psychedelic rock, obscure synth and electronic music, but our drive is to seek new forms of expression. We also find it in the tools we use, working with new equipment, new effects and set-ups. We're always changing how we compose and perform, and it brings new colors and ideas to our palette and that influences us to go in different directions.

What influences in fashion, literature and culture impact your creativity?

VK: We're both huge fans of art with a surreal approach, so we get inspired by all kinds of artists like David Lynch, Peter Lindbergh, Helmut Newton, Alexander McQueen, Andy Warhol, Alejandro Jodorowsky, as well as the aesthetics of German expressionism in cinema and film noir.

What other bands are inspiring you right now?

"...we have the space to venture into more abstract places and experiment."

really happy to be part of it.

What are your favorite tour or stage stories? Share 'em here.

VK: There are so many stories... Where to start? Touring is so challenging and so unexpected at the same time. It's also a huge learning curve for many musicians as it often challenges the human level. Musicians often travel with a lot of equipment and on small budgets. We've met amazing people with great love for music, often we found a lot in common to share and it's beautiful to feel the embrace and support. It was great when we toured South Spain. One of the venues was just in front of the beach. It felt like a holiday. We could go for a swim in warm waters before and after soundcheck. After the show we slept in a caravan parked next to the beach rented by the promoter. It was special to be connected to nature and end the night after the show looking at the sky full of stars and dreaming up the next VK steps. Also performing at the Gothic Pogo Festival in Leipzig was really on the top of the spectrum for us. We didn't really know anyone from the organization or the other artists personally—we hadn't actually met in person before, just spoke through email—but the moment we arrived there we found an amazing community of people who treated us with so much love and respect, that really gave us a huge boost. And then on top of that a beautiful venue with great technicians and a room full of high energy

VK: To tell you the truth, we don't listen to that much modern music or that much music related to the style that we make. Of course, we really like lots of new music coming out, but it's not really where we find our inspirations. We go back to our earlier influences for that. Stuff like Brian Eno, Tangerine Dream, King Crimson, Magma, Gong, David Byrne, Steve Hillage, FSOL, Iggy pop, Alan Vega, Thin Lizzy, Rory Gallagher, Grace Jones, David Bowie, Janis Joplin, and so many more, but these ones are always present.

How would you describe the current alternative music scene where you live?

VK: There's always been a strong undercurrent for the alternative scene here. Rock, punk and experimental music definitely have a big space in the heart of Portugal. In the last few years there's been a new surge in creative people moving to the Lisbon area from other parts of Portugal and beyond, and they are developing new outlets, events and spaces, encouraging collaboration and experimentation. It's still developing and finding its footing and at times can be a bit dispersed, but that's kind of how the alternative scene goes. It's just incredible the quality and variety of art coming out of it, and it's evolving all the time in really exciting ways and we're

audience. That's exactly the type of energy that we look for in a show.

Tell us about your latest release.

VK: *Bodhi Labyrinth* (B.L.) was released in March 2020 just before the Covid 19 pandemic struck in Europe. The message of this album is to make us aware of the reality of our society today. The lyrics are encoded in sarcasm, euphemism, hyperbole and irony, where we dig through the archives of a lonely civilization and question the purpose of life versus governmental structures, where money is a priority and where love is forgotten. Within the noise of a present-day selfish society, Velvet Kills passes on the message and appeals to the universe to elevate humans to a higher state of positive vibration, the Key is Love. The whole world was in quarantine and online, and we believe the message of *B.L.* started to reach more people. We've had a lot of fans reaching out expressing their love. Also, we finished filming the video for the first single "Bitch Face" just before the quarantine started, and it was a treasure to have been able to bring so many of our good friends together along with new friends, director Alan Depreze and his incredible team, and experience that amount of closeness. It really helped us all through that time, being able to look back at those images and remember those feelings. *Bodhi Labyrinth* is also a point of transition for VK's sound. We felt that we were really able to distill the essence of the feelings that we want to



evoke with Velvet Kills, and it gathered the labels Icy Cold Records, Manic Depression Records and Unknown Pleasures Records, all in the same release.

Recently we've also released an album of remixes, *Bodhi Labyrinth Re-imagined*, where we put together a group of artists from different scenes, Bjoerlin, LOLA ZAZA, Anyer Quantum, Dave Inox and Chris Shape and let them impart their unique visions into the VK universe. We're really happy with the work they've done.

What's next for your band?

VK : We'll continue our journey. More music, more shows, more videos, more collaborations. Also, since *Bodhi Labyrinth* was released just before this pandemic, we haven't even had a chance to perform it for our fans yet, so we're really looking forward to returning to the road and presenting our new work at the Mini Cave Festival, North Shadows Festival, Stereogum and more shows that we'll be announcing soon. There are some new collaborations that we've already finished that'll be coming out soon, as well as a piece for ICON, a Siouxsie Sioux tribute album, which will be released along with a book, and a tribute to Sisters of Mercy that'll be released through Unknown Pleasures Records, both later this year. Also, we've got a behind-the-scenes mini documentary that will be coming out soon combining some of the outtakes and video taken by Antonio Colombini. We're also working on a new album that we'll be revealing more details about soon. We're really excited about that. But for now, we're going to have to keep you in the dark a little longer. We can tell you though that the title is *Beyond Destination*, so we'll leave you to ponder that. || **A**

Check out velvetkills.com, susanasantosmakeup.com, artmistake.com, facebook.com/suekoart, and facebook.com/harrisivesonofficial.



Roll Call
Kuba Rygal: MARY has been a solo project of my own for its entirety.

“I think creativity comes from a source unknown.”

– Kuba Rygal

When did the band get started and what was the original intention of the band?

Kuba Rygal : I first started MARY formally in Montreal. As soon as I started playing guitar, I started recording songs (very bad songs) and everything just sort of developed naturally from there. I don't think at first there was any sort of specific intention other than being obsessed with creating interesting sounds and compositions.

Tell us more about your name: how does it communicate the sound or vibe of the band?

SR : I felt as though MARY was vague enough. Band names are so strange to begin with. I wanted something that didn't particularly leave any sort of taste. Short and to the point. I liked the way it sounded. So, I went with it. I also liked the gothic correlation.