

Celtic Frost - A Biography

Formed from the remains of seminal death/black metal pioneers Hellhammer in June 1984, with every one of their releases both in the Billboard and UK charts, the Swiss-American Celtic Frost were a pivotal influence on both the extreme metal and gothic metal genres, establishing many of the musical elements that have since become synonymous with bands such as Sepultura, Pantera, Therion, Emperor, Melvins, Paradise Lost, Cradle of Filth, Foo Fighters, Darkthrone, Dimmu Borgir, Obituary, Nile, and uncounted others.

The primal fury captured on Celtic Frost's first album, "Morbid Tales" (1984), and the subsequent EP, "Emperor's Return" (1985), have been widely emulated and are cited as influences on such recordings as Nirvana's "In Utero" (1993). Co-founders and co-writers Tom Gabriel Fischer (a.k.a. Tom Gabriel Warrior, voice and guitars) and Martin Eric Ain (bass) created stark and compelling vistas reminiscent of the writings of H.P. Lovecraft, Robert E. Howard, Aleister Crowley, and Charles Baudelaire. Fischer's trademark nordic warrior vocals and Celtic Frost's unique combination of a primitive yet at the same time highly intricate sonic assault soon made the group one of the leaders of extreme metal. Lyrically, Fischer and Ain depicted civilizations crumbling into decay, capturing the parallels between the corrosive and dark nature of a year's concluding seasons and the recurring collapse of human empires. The addition in early 1985 of legendary US drummer Reed St. Mark enabled the group to take a quantum leap both in the studio and on stage.

The group's second album, "To Mega Therion" (1985), was an epic evolution of the concept, now adding orchestral instrumentation to increasingly heavy songwriting. Swiss surrealist artist and Oscar-winner ("Alien") H.R. Giger's mentorship yielded visually brooding counterparts to Fischer/Ain's artistic vision, with Giger's paintings "Satan I" (1977) and "Victory III" (1981-83) gracing the album's cover. "To Mega Therion" would become a landmark release for an entire scene.

The "Tragic Serenades" EP (1986) featured cover art reminiscent of the "Sisters of Mercy", and the subsequent successful second tour of Europe and North America set the stage for the milestone experimental album "Into the Pandemonium" (1987), often regarded as the band's most pivotal release next to "To Mega Therion". Merging extreme metal with the band's passion for an early Wave scene dominated by acts such as Bauhaus, Wall of Voodoo or Siouxsie and the Banshees, the album included sheer brutality ("Inner Sanctum" and "Babylon Fell"), Goth/New Wave vocals ("Mesmerized"); sampling/EBM fusions ("One In Their Pride"); melodic metal ("I Won't Dance"), and bombastic orchestral pieces ("Rex Irae" and "Oriental Masquerade").

Adorned with a detail scene of the "Hell" part of Hieronymus Bosch's famous triptych "Garden of Delights", and foreshadowing complex neo-classical metal artists like My Dying Bride and Apocalyptica, "Into the Pandemonium" received raving critical reviews all over the globe. The subsequent "I Won't Dance" EP (1986) with its legendary Isolde Ohlbaum cover art completed what was the band's most pronounced statement so far.

But Celtic Frost's line-up, now featuring an additional guitarist in order to enable the live performance of the increasingly complex songs, disintegrated at the end of an extended and highly successful UK/US tour, in late 1987. More than twelve months of legal disagreements with record company Noise Records, who had repeatedly tampered both with "Into the Pandemonium" and the group's artistic freedom, had exerted too much pressure on the line-up and also taken a devastating financial toll. Celtic Frost had defended the group's paramount principle of artistic integrity virtually to the point of total destruction.

On the basis of a new recording contract negotiated between the bands then manager and with CBS/Epic, Celtic Frost regrouped in mid-1988 and began work on a new album. The sessions initially included Ain and drummer Reed St. Mark, then a new line-up that Fischer would later find "completely unsuited" for Celtic Frost's conceptual vision. The resulting album was not the much-rumored mythical and ultimate Celtic Frost project "Necronomicon" but the dysfunctional and radically controversial hardrock album "Cold Lake" (1988), a release which virtually alienated many fans due to its visuals alone.

Two years later, Celtic Frost concluded months of recording sessions at Berlin's Hansa Studios by releasing the complex and metal album "Vanity/Nemesis" (1990), produced by Roli Mosimann (Faith No More, Young Gods, Marilyn Manson, Björk). It was widely regarded as an exceptionally strong comeback. Along with drummer Stephen Priestly, who had already played on Celtic Frost's first album, Martin Eric Ain had returned to the fold. Cover versions of David Bowie's "Heroes" and Bryan Ferry's "This Island Earth" paid homage to some of the artistic roots of Celtic Frost.

The group was now active almost exclusively in the UK and in North America and thus began the two-year development of the long-awaited successor to the dark visions of "Into the Pandemonium" overseas. It was intended to be a double album with the title of "Under Apollyon's Sun". Following the release of the unique career retrospective "Parched With Thirst Am I And Dying" (1992), featuring much unreleased musical and visual material, the group mutually decided to terminate all work on "Under Apollyon's Sun" in spite of its advanced state and to pursue separate paths instead.

Among various projects evolving from the ashes of Celtic Frost was the Fischer-instigated industrial/EBM project Apollyon Sun, which continued to develop his unique personal vision with an advanced concept. Considered the "elder statesmen" of innovative metal, Fischer and Ain saw their uncompromising conceptual framework and intricate instrumental orchestration blossom into an influence for several cutting-edge genres of today's modern metal, while Celtic Frost have been name-dropped by fellow artists from Satyricon to Creed to Marilyn Manson.

By 1999, an overdue modernization of the Celtic Frost catalogue became possible in cooperation with a now significantly transformed Noise Records. Returning from years of extreme reclusiveness, and working together with the original members of Celtic Frost for the first time in as long a time, Fischer oversaw the re-construction, re-mastering, and production of the five key albums of the group in Berlin in 1999 and 2000. These luxurious official re-issues were released to overwhelming acclaim by media and fans alike and also featured the restored original artwork, EP covers, conceptual packaging, unpublished photos, individual liner notes, complete lyrics, and unreleased music from each album recording session. The re-issue project coincided with the publication Fischer's much-lauded first book, a Celtic Frost autobiography titled "Are You Morbid?" (2000). The book is one of the few first hand reports on the birth of extreme metal during the early 1980s and the resulting branch of the music industry.

The creativity disinterred in the course of the work on the renovation of the band's back catalogue was far more than the re-issue project was designed to absorb, and Fischer and Ain, together with former Apollyon Sun guitarist Erol Unala, eventually began work on an actual new Celtic Frost album, the band's first in over a decade. St. Mark's position in the group, initially left void due to serious health issues, was eventually taken by highly renowned Swiss underground drummer Franco Sesa. Moreover, Ain and Fischer reanimated their old production company, Prowling Death Records, which in 1983 had already released the Hellhammer demos, to finance the new Celtic Frost album and retain full control of the project by the group up to the day of the new album's release.

In late 2004, Fischer partially opened the secretive and protected realm of Celtic Frost's

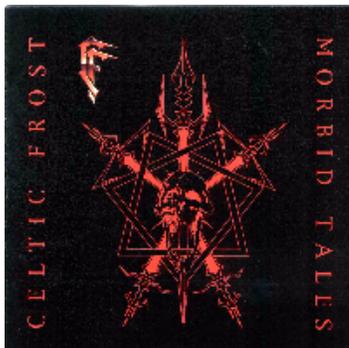
inner sanctum to the outside world by beginning to chronicle the making of the album on his high-traffic blog "Delienation". Surprising to many, this journal revealed a group again driven by misanthropic vulnerability and nihilistic darkness, a group aiming at surpassing everything it had created before, a group whose protagonists proceeded even more courageously than they had on ground-breaking works such as "To Mega Therion" or "Into the Pandemonium". The final days of 2005 saw Celtic Frost signing a worldwide licensing agreement with Century Media, paving the way for the release of the material. Titled "Monotheist" and scheduled for a release in spring 2006, Celtic Frost's new album was produced by the band and co-produced by Peter Tägtgren (Hypocrisy, Dimmu Borgir, Immortal). It is extremely dark, inventive, and radically heavy. The album is to be followed in 2006/2007 by concerts on all continents, allowing Celtic Frost to play for more fans on one single tour than they had in the entire previous history of the band.

As Celtic Frost themselves would put it: nihil verum nisi mors.

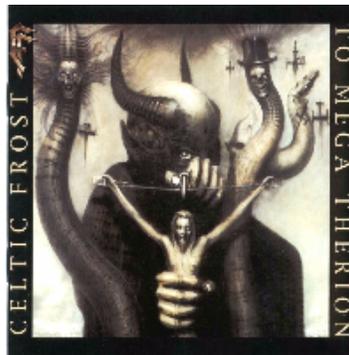
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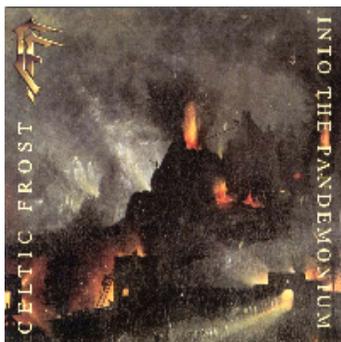
Discography - Albums



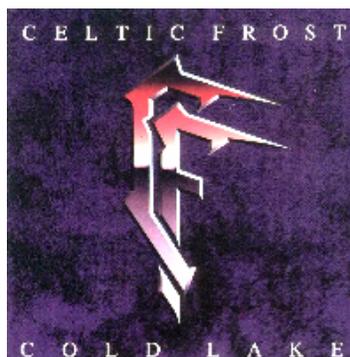
"Morbid Tales"
1984, Modern Music/Noise Records
(official reissue: Europe 1999; North America 2000)
Art: Celtic Frost



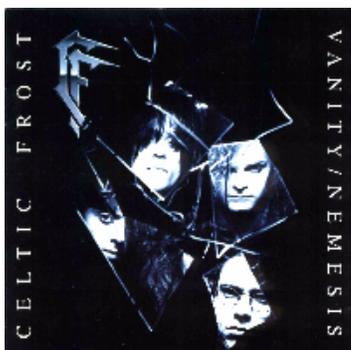
"To Mega Therion"
1985, Modern Music/Noise Records
(official reissue: Europe 1999; North America 2000)
Art: H.R. Giger, "Satan I"



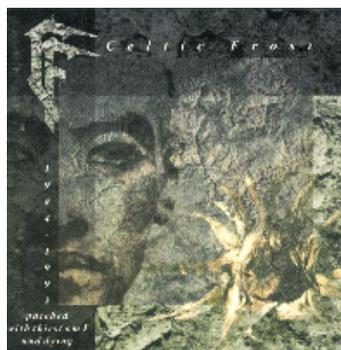
"Into the Pandemonium"
1987, Modern Music/Noise Records
(official reissue: Europe 1999; North America 2000)
Art: Hieronymus Bosch, "Garden of Delights"



"Cold Lake"
1988, Modern Music/Noise Records & CBS/Epic
Art: Celtic Frost



"Vanity/Nemesis"
1990, EMI/RCA
(official reissue: Europe 1999; North America 2000)
Art: Martin Becker & Celtic Frost



"Parched with Thirst am I and Dying"
1992, Modern Music/Noise Records
(official reissue: Europe 1999; North America 2000)
Art: Istvan Vizner & Celtic Frost



"Monotheist"
2006, PDR/Century Media
Art: Michel Casarramona & Martin Eric Ain



Hellhammer - "Apocalyptic Raids"
1984, Modern Music/Noise Records
(official reissue: 1990; "Apocalyptic Raids 1990 A.D.")
Art: Martin Eric Ain & Tom Gabriel Fischer